

# Catechetical Resources – The Third Commandment

## Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it Holy

*by Harold E. Warnke*

### The Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.\*

#### What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but receive it as holy, and gladly hear and learn it.

#### I. What does God say about the Sabbath Day?

- A. In Old Testament times God gave His people strict laws regarding the Sabbath and other festivals.

The writer of this paper treated the Sabbath Law extensively in his papers on "The Giving of the Law" and on "The Moral, Ceremonial, and Civil Law." Consequently, in this paper we shall restrict ourselves to reviewing the essentials and adding a few other thoughts. For additional comments the reader is referred to the other two papers.

In both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, the two chapters in which the Ten Commandments are written, our God used more words to present His Third Commandment than He used for any other, excepting only the First. In the New International Version (NIV) 97 words are used to transmit the Third Commandment, in contrast to just four words for both the Fifth and the Seventh. Furthermore, more than 150 additional Old and New Testament Bible passages speak of the Sabbath, as the reader will quickly learn, if he will consult a Bible concordance or a topical Bible. (See, for example, Nehemiah 10:31; Isaiah 56:2 and 58:13,14; Jeremiah 17:27; Ezekiel 22:8; Matthew 12:9-13; Mark 6:2; Acts 16:3 and 17:2; etc.)

Why did God have so much to say about the Sabbath, the time from Friday at sundown until Saturday at sundown? What really was the purpose of the Sabbath? The answers are written in the various laws that God gave in regard to this seventh day of the week.

1. With His Old-Testament Sabbath Law God provided rest for the body. This point is stressed in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Exodus 20:9-11, for example, states:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Other Bible references emphasize the same point. For example, Exodus 34:21 forbade plowing or harvesting on the Sabbath; Exodus 35:3 forbade cooking or baking on this day; Numbers 15:32 prohibited

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\* The Catechism text is the one suggested by a committee to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1979, although Dr. Luther wrote as the heading for the Third Commandment: "Thou shalt sanctify the holy day." Bible references are from the NIV, unless otherwise indicated.

woodgathering; Nehemiah 10:31 forbade buying or selling anything on the Sabbath, while Nehemiah 13:15-21 tells how Nehemiah roundly condemned harvesting, grape gathering, and merchandizing on the Sabbath. Bearing of burdens was also forbidden on this last day of the week (Jeremiah 17:21).

God decreed the death penalty for the disobedience of these Sabbath day laws, a severe penalty indeed. Exodus 35:2 states: "Whoever does any work on it (the Sabbath) must be put to death." And we know of at least one occasion when this penalty was inflicted: "The Lord said to Moses, 'The man (who gathered wood on the Sabbath) must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp'" (Numbers 15:32-36).

From the Bible passages cited above one can readily understand that one of the major purposes of God's Sabbath Law was to provide rest for the body from the weary labors of the preceding six days. That was truly a blessing from God, a partial relief and refreshment from the dreadful effects of sin that made work difficult and wearisome (Genesis 3:17-19). God specifically mentioned that blessing in Exodus 23:12: "Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed."

Yet, when all of this has been said, we must remember that God never intended that all work of every kind should be forbidden on the Sabbath. Otherwise, one would have to lie in bed for 24 hours without moving a muscle, for every movement is really work.

On the contrary, certain kinds of work were not only allowed on the Sabbath, but commanded, as we know from various Bible passages and examples. The priests and Levites, for instance, always worked on this day when they prepared the sacrifices. All work done in connection with Israel's worship on the Sabbath was commanded in many Bible passages.

The same was true of emergency or mercy works, for Christ asked: "If any of you have a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?" (Matthew 12:11)

The answer was obvious, even though no one spoke it: Of course, one would in such an emergency help that poor animal. Thereafter, our Lord proceeded to heal the man with the shriveled hand, even though it was on a Sabbath day, saying: "How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:12).

What do you suppose was the reaction of the Pharisees who saw this miracle of mercy? Did they rejoice in the blessing that this unfortunate man had received from the Lord? Not at all! "The Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus" (Matthew 12:14), kill Him for doing good on the Jewish Sabbath! They simply would not understand that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Unfortunately, they believed the opposite.

## 2. With His Old-Testament Sabbath Law God provided refreshment for the soul.

To some extent, this point is already indicated by the words of the Sabbath Commandment: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exodus 20:11). On the seventh day Israel was to remember the almighty Creator of everything that exists, who rested on that day and hallowed it.

Commenting on these words, "the Lord...made it holy," Dr. Luther wrote: "This, then, should move us to understand that the seventh day is to be used primarily for a church service," (Quoted by R. Pieper, *Der kleine Katechismus Luthers*, Vol. 1, page 98; hereafter referred to as R. Pieper). The great Reformer wrote similarly in his *Large Catechism*: "What is meant by 'keeping it holy'?" Nothing else than to devote it to holy words, holy works, holy life. In itself, the day needs no sanctification, for it was created holy. But God wants it to be holy to you. So it becomes holy or unholy on your account, according as you spend the day doing holy or unholy things" (*Large Catechism*, 87).

God's Old Testament Sabbath Law apparently did not require regular preaching of the Word, although burnt offerings, a sign of gratitude to God, were doubled on this day (Numbers 28:9,10). We know also that King David made various provisions for worship in the temple on the Sabbath and on other holy days, including regulations for the priests, the Levites, the singers, and the orchestra (I Chronicles 23-26).

Then, as worship in synagogues developed in various places, it included the reading and explaining of Scripture passages. For example, Luke 4:16-21 tells how Jesus visited the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was His custom, then read from the prophet Isaiah and commented on these verses. "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips." St. Paul and other apostles continued this custom of preaching the Word on the Sabbath day (Acts 17:2).

Thus, the Word that was preached on the Sabbath strengthened the faith of many, kept them in the true faith, and brought them that refreshment for their souls that all of us desperately need.

### 3. With His Old Testament Sabbath Law God pointed His people to the coming Savior.

The entire Ceremonial Law, which meticulously regulated Israel's worship, pointed forward to the Messiah, as various Bible passages tell us. One of the best known is Colossians 2:16,17. In speaking of the regulations regarding food, drink, festivals, and of the Sabbath Day, these verses call all of them "a shadow of things that were to come; the reality, however is found in Christ." All of these laws foreshadowed Christ in one way or another.

The major way in which the Sabbath foreshadowed our Lord is through the rest offered for body and soul. Sabbath means rest; it foreshadowed that perfect rest, resulting from the forgiveness of our sins, which Christ would procure for our souls. This thought is carried out at length in Hebrews 4. In that chapter the sacred writer shows how Jesus gives us perfect spiritual rest with His Gospel of sins forgiven. "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9). "Now we who have believed (the Gospel) enter that rest" (Hebrews 4:3). "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest" (Hebrews 4:11). That perfect rest for our souls procured and brought to us by Christ in His Word is the true Sabbath toward which all the Old Testament Sabbaths pointed. Every celebration of the Sabbath was therefore to remind Israel of the perfect rest that was theirs through the work of the Messiah. Jesus surely had that in mind, when He issued that well-known and widely-loved invitation: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Yes, indeed, like everything else in the Old Testament, the Sabbath pointed to Christ; it found its real and perfect fulfillment in Him.

### 4. With His other Old-Testament festivals God had various purposes in mind.

In Old Testament times, God instituted a complete Church Year consisting of the Sabbath and various other church festivals. If we examine Bible passages that treat the institution of these festivals, we can quite readily understand God's purposes in giving His children these regulations. There was, for example the Festival of the New Moon, mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament. (See, for example, Numbers 10:10 and 28:11-15). Thereby Israel consecrated a natural division of time to God (the nation had lunar months), just as it set apart each day with a burnt offering.

The three major Old Testament festivals were Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of the Tabernacles. All men were required to celebrate these feasts annually in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16). The week-long Passover commemorated Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt; it pointed forward to Christ, the perfect Passover Lamb (I Corinthians 5:7). It began on the fourteenth day of the first month called Abib (later called Nisan), corresponding to our April (Numbers 28:16-25; etc.). Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, was celebrated fifty days after Passover, on the sixth of Sivan (our June). It was a harvest festival to thank the Lord for the beginning of the grain harvest (Deuteronomy 16:9-12; etc.). The Feast of Booths or Tabernacles was celebrated from the 15-22 of the seventh month called Ethanim (our October). It was also a harvest festival to thank our God for the late harvest (Numbers 29:12-38; etc.). The Great Day of Atonement, held five days before the Feast of Booths, dramatically illustrated God's forgiveness through the shedding of blood; it pointed toward the perfect sacrifice of our Lord (Leviticus 16 and 23:26-32).

Thus we can readily see that God had the temporal, spiritual, and eternal welfare of His people in mind with the divinely ordained Old-Testament Church Year.

B. In New-Testament times God abolished the Sabbath and all other Old-Testament holy days.

1. With Christ's death God abolished the entire Ceremonial Law including the Sabbath.

Since the entire Ceremonial Law, including the Sabbath, pointed forward to Christ, as we demonstrated in I,A,3, it follows that the Ceremonial Law is no longer needed today. In one respect it is like a road map that pointed the way to Christ. When the destination is reached, the road map is no longer needed; neither is the Ceremonial Law needed after Christ came. It was of value primarily for one nation for one particular period of time (from about 1500 B.C., the time of Moses, until Christ's death).

Various Bible passages tell us that the Ceremonial Law, as far as its commandments are concerned, is abolished. One of the clearest is Colossians 2:16,17, a passage previously cited: "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." If no one can judge us in these matters, if no one can condemn us because we have not kept these various commandments, then, obviously, these laws no longer apply to us.

Furthermore, in his Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul compares the Ceremonial Law with laws that govern a child until the time comes when he inherits the estate. Before he receives the estate, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father (Galatians 4:1,2). That, exactly, was the condition of God's Old Testament children—they lived under various ceremonial laws. But now that Christ has come, they and we are no longer slaves, but sons and heirs (Galatians 4:7). Then follows the logical question: "How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles (of the Ceremonial Law)? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days (especially the Sabbath) and months and seasons and years! I fear for you that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you" (Galatians 4:7-11). "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" (Galatians 3:1). That is some pretty strong language with which St. Paul clearly showed the Galatians and us that all of the provisions of the Ceremonial Law, including the Sabbath, are abolished forever. More than that, if anyone insists on keeping the Sabbath, he really does not understand the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel that has freed us from the demands and the curse of the Ceremonial Law.

Hebrews 4:11 also shows that the Sabbath, the office of the high priesthood, and other facets of the Ceremonial Law pointed forward to Christ, the perfect High Priest, who brings us perfect rest. "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves" (Hebrews 10:1). "But when this Priest (Christ) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12). "And where these sins have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin" (Hebrews 10:18), no more high priesthood, no more lambs to sacrifice, in fact, no more ceremonial laws of any kind.

In view of such clear Bible passages, it is difficult to understand how some Christian churches still insist on keeping the Sabbath and other parts of the Ceremonial Law. Why can't they understand what Dr. Luther wrote in his Large Catechism? "According to its literal, outward sense, this commandment (the Third) does not concern us Christians. It is an entirely external matter like the other ordinances of the Old Testament connected with particular customs, persons, times, and places, from all of which we are now set free through Christ" (*Large Catechism*, 82). May we always cling to this true teaching! (It is interesting to note that both Jesus and St. Paul referred to the 10 Commandments, but never mentioned the Sabbath day. See, e.g., Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:9.)

2. God has not replaced the Sabbath with another day for worship in New-Testament times.

One may search the New Testament from beginning to end without ever finding a divinely instituted day for worship. No holy days, no Sundays, not even one day in the week is ever commanded to be set aside for worship.

True, many church bodies, while recognizing that the Sabbath has been abolished, nevertheless believe that God has replaced the Sabbath with Sunday as our day of worship. (Some of these bodies even call Sunday the Sabbath.) Among them are the Roman Catholic, the Methodist, and others. They maintain that Sunday is a divinely instituted holy day, but they are wrong.

To counteract this false teaching our Augsburg Confession (XXVIII, 58, 59) correctly states: "Those who consider the appointment of Sunday in place of the Sabbath, as a necessary institution are very much mistaken, for the Holy Scriptures have abrogated the Sabbath and teach that after the revelation of the Gospel all ceremonies of the old law may be omitted."

3. Consequently, the Christian Church gradually developed its own calendar of days for worship.

Since God gave us no specific days for worship in New Testament times, but since He does want us to worship Him, it follows that the Christian Church could then choose the days on which it wished to worship. That is exactly what the Church did. Over the centuries, it developed a well-organized and beautifully ordered Church Year with days for weekly worship plus various major and minor festivals, as we shall hear somewhat more at length in Section III, B, 3 of this paper.

II. What does God forbid with his Third Commandment?

A. God forbids despising His spoken Word.

Since the Sabbath has been abolished, someone might ask: Is the Third Commandment, then, still in effect? If it is, what does it prohibit? The answer is a resounding, "Yes, the Third Commandment is in effect and will be until time ends." Only the ceremonial part of the Commandment has been abolished, but the heart remains. And what is the New Testament Third Commandment? It is one that forbids despising the spoken and written Word; it requires that we receive the Word as holy and gladly hear and learn it, as we shall show in the following paragraphs.

Dr. Luther understood this Commandment very well. He wrote in his *Large Catechism* (84) "Most especially, we keep holy days so that people may have time and opportunity, which otherwise would not be available, to participate in public worship, that is, that they may assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then praise God with song and prayer."

With this statement Dr. Luther focused upon the heart of the Third Commandment: It commands us to worship God (not, worship on the Sabbath). Many Bible passages command such worship, in order that we may be blessed by the Word and in order that we might show our appreciation for God's blessings. See, for example, Ps. 29:2; 66:4; 95:6, 100:103; 116:12-17; 119:108; etc.

Again, the great Reformer wrote (*Large Catechism*, 96):

Therefore this Commandment is violated not only by those who grossly misuse and desecrate the holy day, like those who in their greed and frivolity neglect to hear God's Word or lie around in taverns dead drunk like slime, but also by that multitude of others who listen to God's Word as they would to any other entertainment, who only from force of habit go to hear preaching and depart again with as little knowledge of the Word at the end of the year as at the beginning.

In those paragraphs, Dr. Luther correctly summarized what the Third Commandment forbids: despising the Word of our God, a sin that can be committed in various ways. That is the thought that we shall expand in this section II.

1. God instituted the holy ministry, in addition to the royal priesthood of all believers, to bless us through His spoken Word.

Our God has made all Christians royal priests, as I Peter 2:9 tells us: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood," Revelation 1:5,6 also tells us that Christ has made us to be "Kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father," a thought that is repeated in Revelation 5:10.

This means that every one of us who is a follower of Christ has both the privilege and the responsibility of showing forth the praises of our God (I Peter 2:9), of preaching the Word to every person on earth (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16), of admonishing and correcting one another with the Word (Colossians 3:16; Matthew 18:15), of forgiving the sins of the penitent and retaining the sins of the impenitent (Matthew 16:19; John 20:22,23), and even at times of administering the sacraments.

In addition to this general priesthood of all believers, God has also instituted the special office of the public ministry to serve larger groups of people. That is told to us in such Bible passages as Ephesians 4:8-12, which lists various kinds of public ministers, gifts of God to His church. Acts 20:28 tells us that the elders or ministers are overseers over God's flock, and II Corinthians 5:18 states that God gave us "the ministry of reconciliation."

These members of the public ministry are called into their office by God through any group of Christians that needs their services. Essentially, God calls them in the same way as He called Matthias to serve in place of Judas, who had committed suicide (Acts 1:15-26). He does it through a group of Christians. In order to become a member of the public ministry, one must have the proper qualifications, as mentioned in Titus 1:5-9 and I Timothy 3. One must also be properly called by a group of Christians, as St. Paul wrote in Romans 10:15, "Now can they preach unless they are sent?"

What is the work of these called ministers? St. Paul answered clearly in II Timothy 4:2: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season, correct, rebuke, encourage—with great patience and careful instruction." The purpose of such preaching is stated in Ephesians 4:12: "To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." Or, more simply: "Go...preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15, K.J.), that they may believe in Christ and be saved (Mark 16:16).

You can see, then, that God instituted the public ministry for our welfare, to strengthen us spiritually, to administer the sacraments properly, to teach the Word correctly, to warn us against spiritual dangers, to correct us when we stray, and to rebuke us when we live in sin. Every bit of this work is desperately needed by all of us sinners, and we can never thank God sufficiently for giving us members of the public ministry for our good. Therefore, the Wisconsin Synod Doctrinal Committee stated, "The various offices for the public preaching of the Gospel...are all gifts of the exalted Christ to His Church, which the Church gratefully receives and employs under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the spiritual body of Christ" (*This We Believe*).

2. Yet, we often despise God's spoken Word in various ways.

At first thought one would surely expect that everyone would gladly hear the Word spoken by the called ministers as frequently as possible. If some billionaire would open his vaults and tell us that we can take from them as much silver, gold, and jewels as we wish, there would surely be a wild stampede to reach that treasure. If someone who was starving to death was told that a certain warehouse contained unlimited supplies of free food, he would undoubtedly hurry to that building as fast as possible.

Well, then, when we learn that the Word of our God is worth more than all the wealth of the world (the Word is "more precious than gold," Psalm 19:10), that it is the one thing without which no one can live joyfully or die peacefully, would you not think that everyone would hasten to hear that Word when it is preached to us by God's own ministers? Would you not believe that all people would be overjoyed to hear the Gospel of Jesus, the only Savior of mankind? One might expect that, but everyone knows it doesn't happen. And the reason is

told us often enough in Scripture: "Every inclination of the thoughts of his (man's) heart was only evil" (Genesis 6:5); "They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one" (Psalm 14:3 K.J.); "Natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him" (I Corinthians 2:14 K.J.).

Only after we have been brought to faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit do we begin to love our Lord and His Word. And even then, our flesh is so weak and the temptations are so strong that we often neglect the Word, forget its boundless blessings, and fail to hear it. That is why God gave us the Third Commandment: to guide us so that we hear the Word regularly, believe it implicitly, and follow it faithfully. Anything less than that is a sin, as we shall hear in the paragraphs to follow.

a. We despise the spoken Word by not hearing it.

The most obvious way of despising the spoken Word is by not hearing it at all. That is a sin of two-thirds, perhaps even three-fourths, of the world's people who are not members of any Christian church. They seldom, or never, hear the Word of our God. They are characterized by Jeremiah the Prophet: "The Word of the Lord is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it" (Jeremiah 6:10); and by Israel's greatest prophet, Isaiah: "These are a rebellious people...children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction" (Isaiah 30:9). (Both of these passages were directed originally to people who had fallen away from God, but they apply also to those who never heard it.)

Even among people who claim membership in Christian churches, there is frequently a frightful lack of hearing the Word. For example, it is not at all unusual for churches in England and Europe that seat 1,000 or even 2,000 people to have a regular Sunday attendance of a dozen or several dozen people. In America also, there are thousands of congregations whose average attendance is only 30 or 40 percent of its membership, or even less.

True, in some of these cases, it is difficult or impossible for a member to be present at the church service. Sickesses, emergencies, and necessary works do happen. Yet, all will surely agree that many or most of the absentees simply do not love the Word sufficiently for them to hear it regularly. They despise the spiritual meal that the Lord has prepared for them at church, just as the invited guests despised the invitation to the wedding of the king's son (Matthew 22:1-14). They manufacture excuses for not hearing the Word, just as the guests did when the man made a great supper and invited many (Luke 14:16-24). In this case, one man excused himself by saying that he had to examine a recently purchased plot of ground; another had bought five yoke of oxen that he wanted to try out; a third claimed that he had just been married and therefore could not come. Excuses for not hearing the Word today are just as flimsy. They mask the real reasons for refusing God's invitation to hear: these people simply do not want to attend God's spiritual banquet.

Some modern (yet ancient) excuses for not hearing the Word are listed and effectively demolished by Dr. William Dallmann in his pamphlet, *Churchgoing*. Since this pamphlet is long out of print, we shall summarize a few of Dr. Dallmann's points:

1 and 2. I do not like the preacher and his preaching—If this is true, then do what Matthew 18:15 says, "Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." If he preaches the Gospel and leads a Christian life, then thank God for him. Don't forget that the Old Testament prophets were right good preachers of the Word, but people hated their preaching and stoned them. When Christ preached, the Pharisees were offended by it. Remember: As long as your pastor preaches God's Word, you must hear him whether or not you like the preacher and the preaching, just as you take medicine whether you like the taste or not.

Dr. Dallmann listed as excuse number 4: "There are so many hypocrites within the church." Answer:

That's all right; there's always room for one more; so come on, you will feel at home.

What! You're not a hypocrite! Well, come along anyhow; you are the man the church is looking for. Come, pull off your coat, roll up your sleeves, and put the hypocrites out of the church, as Christ drove the moneychangers out of the Temple. Come, we need you badly.

By the way, you seem to think it's strange there should be hypocrites in the church. I do not see why. There is no perfection in this world, and so you ought not expect the outward organization of the church to be perfect. And besides, Christ Himself tells you that the Kingdom of God is like unto a net full of fishes, some good and some bad." (Matthew 13:47,48.) (We cannot, of course, read peoples' hearts—at the Last Day the angels of God will separate the weeds from the wheat. Matthew 13:24-30.)

Another thing: You are to go to church to hear the Gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believeth, Romans 1:16; and so it makes no difference to you if hypocrites were all around you.

Excuse number 5: "The members are not sociable." Answer: "Remember that the church was not instituted and organized for entertainment purposes, but for preaching the Gospel." (Members, however, should always practice hospitality and kindness toward one another, I Peter 4:9; II Peter 1:5-8.)

Excuse number 8: "My work keeps me away." Answer: "If you have so much work that you must break God's Law to attend to it, then you have more work than God wants you to have...seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." (In such rare cases where Sunday work is mandatory, one might arrange to attend an early or a week-day service, or one can worship by means of a taped service.)

Excuses number 9 and 10: "I must prepare dinner because I expect company today. There is no law, human or divine, commanding you to prepare dinner just at the time the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached." Remember, too, how Jesus rebuked Martha who was preparing dinner, instead of listening to His Word, as Mary did (Luke 10:38-42). If you break the Commandment to hear the Word for the sake of company, then this passage rebukes you: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37).

Excuse number 16: "I know enough of the Bible without going to church." Answer: "Lend me your ears and let me gently whisper into their furry depths that you are an arrogant ignoramus...if you will pay close attention you will find something new or something forgotten treated in every sermon."

Dr. Dallmann then quoted Dr. Luther's *Large Catechism*, 99, which Dr. Theodore Tappert translated as follows:

Those conceited fellows should be chastised who, after hearing a sermon or two, become sick and tired of it and feel that they know it all and need no more instruction. This is precisely the sin that used to be among mortal sins and was called acidia—that is indolence or satiety—a malicious, pernicious plague with which the devil bewitches and befuddles the hearts of many so that he may take us by surprise and stealthily take the Word of God away from us.

Excuse number 17: "I can read my Bible at home." Answer:

I am delighted to hear that you have a Bible and that you can read. But - er - excuse me - do you read the Bible? You see, experience teaches that those who do not care to go to church also do not wear out too many Bibles by too much reading. Now, if you read the Bible you will doubtless in your waking moments have come across those passages like these:

'Hear' the Word of the Lord, Come that ye may 'hear,' and many more like these.

Of course, you read the Bible as the Word of God, now what are you going to do about such plain passages which tell you to go to church?

You can read your Bible at home. So you can; so you should. So could Christ, yet, it was His custom to go into the synagogue on the Sabbath-Day to read (Luke 4:16). What was not too



much for the Master ought not to be too much for the servant; for the servant is not above his Master.

Excuse number 18: "I can be a Christian without going to church." Answer: "That's what you say. The apostle did not at all agree with you, he says: "He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of error" (I John 4:6). And Christ says: "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. But ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep." John 8:47; 10:27,26.

Few of us would answer the excuses for not attending the church services in the same way as did Dr. Dallmann. However, his apt remarks give one food for thought; they show that excuses for not hearing the Word do not change over the years; and above all, they refer us to the one real reason for not hearing the Word: "You hear them (God's Words) not, because you are not of God." In most cases (illness and other emergencies excepted) there is just one real reason for despising the Word by not hearing it: People do not love it and its Lord sufficiently to hear what He has to say. All the other reasons that are given are generally not the real ones. These people despise the Word by not hearing it.

And what shall we say about despising the Holy Sacrament by not receiving it? Our Lord Jesus gave us His body and blood under the bread and wine to bless us. He therefore expects that we shall receive it frequently and gladly. How, then, can anyone who claims to be a Christian turn his back to this precious gift?

b. We despise the spoken Word by hearing it, but not paying attention to what is preached.

One of the most frequent sins against the Third Commandment is hearing the Word but not paying attention to what is being preached. Our human nature is simply so dreadfully wicked that everyone of us must often have caught his attention wandering during the service. A man confessed to his pastor one day that he had not heard a sermon for many years. When the pastor expressed surprise, since the man was a regular churchgoer, he said that he, a business man, had always planned his work during the time when he should have been listening to the sermon.

Our Lord spoke about this group of inattentive people in His famous Parable of the Sower and the Seed (Luke 8:4-15). As a sower "was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up." In explaining this part of the parable our Lord said that the seed which fell along the path represents "the ones who hear and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they cannot believe and be saved." Thus the Word is effectively prevented from entering our hearts to do its blessed work. When our attention wanders, we may be missing exactly that part of the service that would otherwise benefit us greatly.

You may remember the story of Eutychus, who "was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on" at Troas. "When he was found asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead" (Acts 20:9). However, in this case God restored him to life again through His Apostle Paul.

Eutychus was by no means the first nor the last to let his attention wander or to fall asleep during the sermon. Yet, such actions are really double sins, a sin against the Second Commandment ("deceiving by God's Word") and a sin against the Third Commandment (not hearing the Word). It is a sin against what our Lord earnestly warns us: "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me'" (Matthew 15:7,8).

Since all of us are in danger of committing these sins, we need to be on our guard constantly, praying earnestly that God would preserve us from letting our attention wander or from attending the church service, only for social, business or other similar reasons.

c. We despise the spoken Word by hearing it, by paying attention to it, but not believing it.

This type of transgression is one of the most common and most deadly sins ever committed against the spoken and the written Word. Examples are recorded in both the Old and the New Testaments. For instance, during Jeremiah's day he was commanded by God to preach and to warn about all of the frightful evils that would surely descend upon Judah because of its many sins. "It may be," the Lord said, "the house of Judah will take to heart all the evil I plan to do to them and so everyone will turn from his evil way and I will forgive their wrong and their sins" (II Chronicles 36:3, Beck). But did Israel listen to the Word of the Lord? The answer is given by the action of King Jehoiakim. When Jeremiah's scroll with all of those threatenings was read to the king, what was his reaction? "As often as Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut it off with a penknife and throw it into the fire and the brazier till the whole scroll was burned in the fire and the brazier" (II Chronicles 36:23, Beck). Even though some of the princes "begged the king not to burn the scroll, he refused to listen to them" (II Chronicles 36:25, Beck). He refused to believe the Word that was being read to him. His evil example was followed by multitudes of other Israelites.

The entire nation of Judah committed the same blasphemy in the years before that dreadful Babylonian Captivity. Scripture tells us, "the Lord, the God of their fathers, repeatedly sent messages by his messengers because He wanted to spare His people and His house" (II Chronicles 36:15, Beck). But how did the people receive this spoken Word? "They mocked God's messengers, despised what He said, and made fun of His prophets till the Lord's fury rose against His people, till there was no way to help them (II Chronicles 36:16, Beck).

Were the Israelites of New Testament times any better? Had they learned the lessons that their fathers' sins should have taught them? Oh, indeed not. One day the Pharisees and the Herodians came "to Jesus to catch Him in His Word" (Mark 12:13-17). (This was the time they asked Jesus whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar.) In other words, they did not come to be blessed by Jesus' Words; they came to criticize, to find something on which they could condemn Him. As far as believing the life-giving words of our Lord was concerned, that was the farthest thought from their minds. They continued in the dreadful sins of their fathers, despising God's Word to their tragic end.

We know, for example, how Jesus repeatedly met with open hostility from His own nation to His gracious life-saving words. One time He told His enemies plainly: "You do not believe the one He (the Father) sent" (John 5:38). Another time the people of Nazareth, His own city, refused to believe what He said, even though they had to admit that He taught in a marvelous way and worked astonishing miracles. They said, in derision, "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him" (Mark 6:3).

Is this sin of hearing God's Word and not believing it any less prevalent today? If anything, matters seem to have become much worse. Mark Twain, one of America's favorite authors, typifies this hatred of the Word. He must have heard the Word or at least read it sufficiently to become acquainted with some of it. But did he believe it? His writings show that he seldom missed an opportunity to ridicule the truths of God's Word.

And then consider the almost numberless critics, teachers, pastors, professors, and laymen within the visible church who more or less regularly hear the Word, but do not believe parts of it. Ask them, if they believe Genesis 1-11 and they will maintain that this is not a literal account of the way things happened in the early history of the world, for science has proved otherwise. Ask them, if they believe that the great fish swallowed Jonah and disgorged him three days later, and they will answer that this story isn't factual; it did not really happen. Ask them, if they believe that Jesus worked all the miracles that are ascribed to him in the New Testament, and they will flatly deny that He did. Every major doctrine of the Christian faith has been attacked, denied, or ridiculed by those who hear the Word, but refuse to believe parts of it. One wonders how long God will have mercy upon our nation in the face of such frightful sins against His holy Third Commandment.

d. We despise the spoken Word by hearing it, paying attention to it, believing it, but not living according to it.

This, too, is one of our most common sins. Our Lord referred to it in His Parable of the Two Sons. To each of them the father said, "Go and work today in the vineyard" (Matthew 21:28). One of them said, "I will

not," but later changed his mind and went to work. The other said, "I will, sir," but he did not go. Then Jesus asked a significant question: "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" (Matthew 21:30,31). The answer was obvious even to the chief priests and elders, whom Jesus was addressing.

With this parable our Lord then made this clear application, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him" (Matthew 21:31,32).

In the same way our Lord calls us to faith ("You believe in God, believe also in Me," John 14:1), and then gives us work to do in His vineyard ("This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples," John 15:8). Yet, how many of us serve the Lord wholeheartedly with prayer, word, and deed? For example, our Lord tells us to spread the Gospel to every creature (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15). You surely believe that command, you agree that you are to do it, but do you? While the souls of the unbelievers are perishing eternally, how often do you preach the Word that alone can save them from hell for heaven?

There are many other examples: Jesus once said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 2:35); however, don't most of us, while acknowledging that everything which Jesus said is true, fail to live according to this word? At another time Jesus said, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Matthew 26:41), but are we truly watchful and do we regularly pray that God would protect us from the devil and give us the needed strength to overcome his temptations? Again, our Savior encouraged regular church attendance with his well known, "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it" (Luke 11:28). Most members of the Christian church would readily recognize the truth of that statement, yet, about half of these church members who could be present in church each Sunday are elsewhere when the Word is preached.

Each one of these examples and dozens more are sins against the Third Commandment, sins of hearing the Word, paying attention to it, believing it, but not living according to it. Christ plainly told us the consequences of such sins, as we shall hear in section 4.

e. We despise the spoken Word, when we despise God's called ministers and teachers.

In his essay to the 1888 Minnesota-Dakota (Missouri Synod) convention Pastor C. Ross expanded on this point, when he wrote that all pastors and teachers are servants of Christ, stewards of God's mysteries. And Christ said of them: "He who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16). Every bit of mockery and hatred that the world directs against Christ's servants, affects the Lord Himself and the terrified world will one day have to acknowledge whom they have pierced.

That word, wrote Pastor Ross ("he who rejects you rejects Me") applies to congregational members, when they reject their faithful preacher, if he does not have brilliant gifts, and when they feel that his meager gifts are at fault that the congregation does not prosper. True Christians are to regard their legitimately called pastor, even if his gifts are few, as a man through whom God will save their souls. Furthermore, it is also a despising of the ministerial office, if someone refuses to send his children to church or to school for instruction or if someone unnecessarily moves to an area where there is no orthodox congregation.

To this we add only these thoughts: Pastors and teachers are by no means infallible—they do make mistakes; they are surely not without sin—they are human beings, born in sin, who daily sin in thought, word, and deed; they do not constitute a separate class, somewhat higher than laymen in God's sight—there are no such classes before God.

Yet, because they have been honored by God with the greatest calling in all the world, we must not dishonor them. In so doing, we dishonor God Himself, who clearly said, "Do my prophets no harm" (Psalm 105:15).

3. Despising the spoken Word means losing precious spiritual gifts.

King David referred to this truth in that fine 19th Psalm, verse 10, when he stated that the Words of our God are "more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb." Therefore the writer of Psalm 119 stated, "The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold" (verse 72), and "I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold" (verse 127).

Indeed, when we recall that God's Word is the one spiritual food that our souls need above everything else, as the prophet Jeremiah (15:16) and the Apostle Peter wrote (I Peter 2:2); when we understand that God, through His Word, strengthens our faith, guides us on our way, warns us against sin, and brings us many another blessing, then we can quickly understand that we are losing spiritual gifts by despising the spoken Word.

Dr. C. F. Walther, one of the great Lutheran theologians in American history, understood this point very well. He wrote in the 1877 Synod report of the Western District (cited by Dr. William Dallmann in his Churchgoing):

Therefore it is also no trifle needlessly to stay away from church at times, if it be but once. Many think: Oh! it will not depend upon this one time if I miss church. Ah! poor soul, do you know for a certainty that today a sermon will not be preached which was most specially intended and prepared for you, through which God would save you out of a great danger to your soul, rekindle your dying faith, give you strength to overcome a strong temptation? See you have closed the door at which your God stood and knocked; you have missed the hour of grace; perhaps it will return nevermore.

Since the Word is more valuable than gold or silver, since it brings us many precious and indispensable gifts, would you not expect that everyone will hear it eagerly and regularly? Would you not especially feel this way, since the blessings of the Word are free? Yet, such is the perverse nature of sinful mankind that uncounted millions refuse to hear the Word, thus turning their backs to God's priceless gifts. That's the way in which sin has perverted our minds; that's the way in which the devil leads us astray; that is the perfect method for harming or destroying our souls.

4. Despising the spoken Word is a grave sin against God; it deserves His curse.

Our Lord said it so plainly that even a child can understand: "He that despiseth you (the preachers of the Word) despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me" (Luke 10:16 K.J.). By refusing to hear the Word we are telling Him that we care little or nothing for what He says to us.

What else can we then expect, except what He promised through His faithful prophet Jeremiah? "Hear, O earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law" (Jeremiah 6:19). That calamity soon befell the nation of Israel. The enemy came; the young men and women, the old and the infirm were killed; the temple was plundered of all its treasures and burned; Jerusalem's wall was torn down; and "those who escaped the sword he (the King of Babylon) took as prisoners to Babylon to be his slaves and the slaves of his sons till Persia began to rule" (II Chronicles 36:20 Beck). It all happened because the people committed that dreadful sin of refusing to believe and to follow the Word of God that they had heard.

Through the Prophet Amos God threatened Israel with a spiritual famine, if they continued to disregard His Word: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (Amos 8:11, 12 K.J.). In other words, the message of God, the most valuable thing in the world, will be taken away from us, and we shall be left spiritually blind, naked, helpless, and hopeless, if we despise God's truths by not hearing Him. No greater calamity can ever befall a people.

Equally tragic, despising the Word will surely bring additional judgments of God crashing upon us, for He said: "So, as tongues of fire burn up stubble and dry grass goes down in flames, so their root is like something rotten, and their blossoms go up in dust because they have despised the instruction of the Lord of armies and scorned the Word of the Holy One of Israel. This is why the Lord is very angry with His people and has stretched out His fist against them to strike them. The hills trembled. Their dead bodies lay like rubbish in the middle of the street. Despite all this, He will not stop being angry and will stretch out His hand to strike" (Isaiah 5:24,25 Beck).

Equally frightful is the message of the Prophet Hosea (4:6, Beck): "Ignorance destroys My people. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you so you will not be My priests. You forget the law of your God and I too will forget your children."

Our Lord Jesus promised a similar fearful judgment (Matthew 7:26,27): "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams arose, and the winds blew against that house, and it fell with a great crash." That is a true picture of the end of those people who hear and believe God's Word but refuse to live according to it. Now is the time for all to repent of these sins before it is too late.

These spiritual disasters have actually occurred again and again, as history amply demonstrates. Long ago Dr. Luther pointed out in his dramatic way that Asia Minor once had the Gospel and all of its blessings, but now it has the Turk and the blasphemous Koran; Rome once had the Gospel, but now it has the Pope and his denial of justification by faith. And what shall we say about Palestine itself, the very land where our Savior lived? It rejected Him and now it has the teachings of the Jew and the Arab, both false religions that can never save one's soul. Can God speak any more plainly to America, which despises many of His holy precepts?

Pastor C. Ross in the previously cited paper quotes Heshusius as follows:

Experience clearly shows how the punishment of God's judgment strikes such despisers of the divine Word and the blessed Sacrament. For in time they fall ever deeper into fleshly security; want nothing to do with God's Word and the entire kingdom of Christ; give themselves up to the world, their flesh and Satan, who leads them from one sin into another and so entangles them therein that they can never escape, but must be eternally lost. Others fall into deep spiritual temptations, are unable to grasp any comfort from God's Word, bite and beat themselves with their own thoughts, don't know how to withstand Satan's fiery darts, and consequently sink into despair and eternal ruin.

Many a person probably thinks that it doesn't make any difference if he doesn't ask about the Lord Jesus Christ's ordinance and never goes to the Lord's Table; if he becomes ill, that will be soon enough to send for the pastor. But since he has despised Christ's ordinance in this life, matters may not turn out well for him at all. Usually these people lose their reason and their senses, their speech and all understanding, so that one cannot speak or deal with them, not receive their confession. Sometimes their soul departs before they can receive the Sacrament. In such dreadful cases one can see that God is frightfully angry with those who despise the wholesome ordinance of Christ, and that He will punish such a grave sin with eternal hellfire. (This writer's translation)

##### 5. All of us have sinned against this part of God's Third Commandment.

As we study the various prohibitions of this Commandment, all of us must surely confess with the Psalmist (51:3,4 Beck): "I realize the wrong I have done and my sin is always before me. I sinned against You, against You only, and did what is wrong in Your sight."

And if we still are not thoroughly convinced of our sins against God's Third Commandment, then consider these points made by Dr, Dallmann in his pamphlet Churchgoing.

1. Every time we willfully stay away from church, we break the Third Commandment as really as we break the Fifth Commandment by murdering our neighbor.
2. Every time we speak against going to church, we break the Third Commandment by words as really as a man breaks the Fifth Commandment by smiting (killing) his neighbor with the tongue. Jeremiah 18:18.
3. Every time our looks betray our dislike to go to church, we break third Commandment as really as Cain betrayed the murderer by his looks, when God said to him, "Why are thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen?" Genesis 4:16.
4. Every time there arises in our heart a thought against going to church, we break the Third Commandment as really as "whoso hateth his brother is a murderer" I John 3:15; and both sins are alike damnable.

Since even one sin against the Third Commandment deserves death and eternal destruction, we can only pray, "God have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13), and, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me" (Psa 1m.51:10,11 K.J.). Then, trusting in the merits of Christ our Lord, we have the forgiveness that He earned for us. What an Eternally blessed work our Lord did for us, when He took our sins upon Himself and died with them on the cross!

#### B. God forbids despising His written Word.

In his Large Catechism Dr. Luther did not differentiate between "preaching" and "His Word" referring both of them primarily to the spoken Word. In this section B. we shall consider the expression "His Word" as referring to the written Word.

##### 1. God gave us His written Word for our spiritual welfare.

This entire matter of reading the Scriptures has been treated at length in the author's *Our Bible*, Sections 2 and 3. We shall therefore not repeat; the reader is asked to refer to that essay for additional information on this point.

God told us often enough that He gave us His written Word for our spiritual welfare. For example, this is what He commanded every Israelite king to do: "It (the Word) is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees (Deuteronomy 17:19). That is a command and promise that surely applies equally to all sons and daughters of our King.

Through Isaiah (34:16) God commanded, "Look in the scroll of the Lord and read"; through St. John He admonished: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think that ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39 K.J.); and through the great Apostle Paul we receive this encouragement to read the Word: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

Indeed, the written Word is the most valuable item in our homes, schools, and churches, more valuable than all the other items combined. It is simply indispensable for us children of God.

##### 2. We often despise God's written Word.

Everything that was said above regarding the spoken Word in II, A, 2, a, b, c, and d, applies equally to the written Word. We despise it by not reading it; by reading it and not paying attention to what we are reading; by reading and paying attention to it, but not believing parts of it; by reading it, paying attention to it, believing it, but not living accordingly.

If we are honest with ourselves, we shall undoubtedly confess: "I have sinned against this holy, precious Word in every one of these ways; please, dear God, forgive my negligence for Jesus' sake."

### III. What does God require with his Third Commandment?

#### A. God commands us to receive His Word as holy.

God's Word is holy, since it comes to us from our all-holy God. The Psalmist tells us, "His name (which is almost the same as saying "His Word") is holy and inspires awe" (Psalm 111:9, Beck). God's Word is our most precious possession, worth more than all the gold buried at Ft. Knox. Like the kingdom of God, it is the "one pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:46 K.J.) or the priceless "treasure hid in the field" (Matthew 13:44). It is indeed worth more than all the world's treasures, because it alone shows us our sin and our Savior; it only guides us to a joyful life in this world and to a blessed life hereafter in heaven, blessings that we shall not be able to appreciate truly until we enter the gates of pearl to stand before the shining throne of our Lord in glory.

God's Word is inexhaustible. It is not like the great Mesabi iron range in Minnesota from which almost 100 million tons of ore were mined annually for years. Those mines were among the greatest earthly treasures that God ever bestowed upon any nation, but the ore of even that incredibly rich area is eventually exhausted; This is not true of the Word: The more one mines it, the more precious gems one finds in it. Even the wisest of Christians can study the Word for decades without ever coming close to exhausting its treasures.

Dr. Luther referred to these inexhaustible blessings of the Word with a somewhat different picture. He wrote:

The Bible is an enormously great, wide woods. In it there are many and all kinds of trees from which one can pick various kinds of fruit and produce, for in the Bible one has rich comfort, instruction, admonition, warning, promise, threat. I have for some years read the Bible through twice each year, and even though it were a great, mighty tree and all its words were branches and twigs, yet I have knocked on all branches and little twigs in order to learn gladly what was on them and what they could do; nonetheless, I have everytime knocked down a few apples and some little pears" (Quoted by Dr. F.R.W. Schuetze in his *Entwuerfe and Katechesen, Erster Band*, page 264; this writer's translation.

Since God's Word is holy, since it is error free, since it is the great inspired blessing from our all-holy, all-merciful God, what else can we do, except to stand in awe before it, to reverence it, to receive it as holy? "We are to have a holy awe of God's Word and command our reason to be silent when it speaks...indeed, God's Word is to be so holy to us that the time and place where we consider it becomes holy to us" (Pastor C. Ross in the previously cited work, page 45). Then Pastor Ross refers to Genesis 20:17. That passage tells how Jacob felt when God revealed Himself to him in a dream: "A feeling of awe came over him, and he said, 'How awesome this place is! This is nothing less than God's temple. This is the gateway to heaven'" (Beck).

We remember also what God said, when, from the burning bush, He called Moses: "Do not come near...take your sandals off your feet, because you are standing on holy ground" (Exodus 3:5, Beck). It was holy, because God revealed Himself to Moses there, even as our God also reveals Himself to us today through His Word. The Prophet Habakkuk expressed a similar thought: "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him" (Habakkuk 2:20). King Solomon admonished us to be sure to "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know that they are doing evil" (Ecclesiastes 5:1, RSV).

The New Testament is no less emphatic in telling us that we are to receive God's Word as holy. For example, I Thessalonians 2:13 tells us, "When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."

On the basis of such Bible passages, Dr. Luther could then write in his *Large Catechism* (91, 92):

The Word of God is the true holy thing above all holy things. Indeed, it is the only one we Christians acknowledge and have. Though we have the bones of all the saints or all the holy and consecrated vestments gathered together in one heap, they could not help us in the slightest degree, for they are all dead things that can sanctify no one. But God's Word is the treasure that sanctifies all things. By it all the saints themselves have been sanctified. At whatever time God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or pondered, there the person, the day, and the work are sanctified by it. Not on account of the external work but on account of the Word which makes us all saints. Accordingly, I constantly repeat that all our life and work must be guided by God's Word if they are to be God-pleasing or holy. Where this happens the commandment is in force and is fulfilled.

Receiving God's Word as holy, therefore, means to approach it reverently whenever we have the opportunity to hear or to read it; to hold it in awe as the most precious gift of an all-holy God; and to stand humbly before it, accepting all of it gratefully, as the "one thing needful" above everything else on earth (Luke 10:42 K.J.). Receiving God's Word as holy means to confess with the Psalmist: "Your (God's) teaching is worth more to me than thousands of gold and silvery (Psalm 119:72, Beck); and to say, "I love your commands more than gold or even fine gold" (Psalm 119:127, Beck); and to come to the Word for counsel and advice in every stage and state of life, like the holy writer, who said, "Thy testimonies are also my delight and my counselors" (Psalm 119:24).

#### B. God commands us to hear His Word gladly.

##### 1. That is the plain teaching of Scripture.

When our Lord instituted the office of the Holy Ministry "so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:12), he clearly told His ministers to "preach the Word" (II Timothy 4:2) at all times and in all places. That, of course, takes for granted that God's children will gladly hear the Word that is preached; God doesn't want His pastors to preach to empty benches. That is why the Apostle Paul admonished us to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16). The Word cannot dwell in our hearts richly, except we hear it regularly.

Children of God in all ages have done what God asked them to do; they have gladly heard His Word. When, for example, Samuel was a young child the Lord came to him. The high priest, Eli, then told him that if the Lord "calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening'" (I Samuel 3:9). Samuel did exactly that; he listened carefully to everything God said.

King David expressed similar thoughts in at least two of his Psalms. In Psalm 26:8 he wrote, "Lord, I love the house You've made Your home, the place where Your glory dwells" (Beck); and Psalm 122:1: "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'let us go to the house of the Lord.'"

And what shall we say of that lovely 84th Psalm in which the inspired writer expressed his intense longing for God's house?

How lovely is the place where You live, O Lord of armies! I yearn, yes, I'm wearing out with longing for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my body shout happily to the living God. Even a bird finds a home and a swallow a nest for herself, where she can hatch her young: Your altars, O Lord of armies, my King and my God. Happy are those who live at Your house, always praising You (Psalm 84;1-4, Beck).

Yes, indeed, the way to the Lord's house is a good way to travel, because there we hear the Word, God's own message to His beloved children. We, too, should echo the joy of the Psalmist when hearing the Word, just



as the twelve-year old Jesus did when He visited the Temple at Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-52). As Jesus customarily went to the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16), so may we regularly attend our church services.

You may also remember the story of the "Ethiopian" Eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasures of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He traveled all the way to Jerusalem, a long and difficult journey, to worship our God there. Nor did he forget the Word when his worship was finished. On his way home he was reading in the Book of Isaiah the Prophet, when Philip met him. Philip explained the Word that the eunuch was reading, until the Holy Spirit convinced him that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Savior of the world (Acts 8:26-39). He truly loved to hear the Word of the Lord.

You may also recall the beautiful story of Cornelius (Acts 10). When the Apostle Peter came to preach the Word, Cornelius said to him, "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (Acts 10:33). Oh, that every head of the household might be able to say the same thing, when the time comes for family devotions or for listening to God's Word in the public service! However, even if everyone else in the household despises the Word by refusing to hear it, do, by all means, follow the good example of Mary "who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said" (Luke 10:39). Pastor C. Ross in the previously cited work, wrote about this point in the following paragraphs:

Since God's Word is so constituted that it does not produce satiety, but rather arouses desires for renewed hearing (if one hears it correctly), so we are repeatedly to hear and learn it gladly. But, alas, since Adam hid himself behind the trees after the fall into sin, the "gladly hearing" is in a bad way. Our Old Adam would much rather not hear God speak at all, and since a Christian still has the Old Adam clinging to him, he also has an aversion to God's Word.

Yet, this should by no means happen, but rather as a deer pants for streams of water (a reference to Psalm 42:1), as a babe desires his mother's breast, so we are to hunger and thirst after the pure spiritual milk of the Gospel (I Peter 2:2). As a thirsty traveler perceives the rippling of a spring and eagerly drinks of it, thus our soul ought to receive the Word eagerly and joyfully. It is to be sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, more valuable than gold and much pure gold (a reference to Psalm 19:10). This is to be the case incessantly.

For this reason we ought not to enter God's house as if driven like a cringing slave, but filled with inner desires for God's Word. The Word "gladly" is the most difficult in the Third Commandment. Psalm 26:6-8: "I...go about your altar, O Lord, proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds. I love the house where you live, O Lord, the place where your glory dwells." The Word of God should make the church beloved and precious to us as the Tabernacle of God with men, as a type of the heavenly Jerusalem.

2. The Church chose Sunday as the regular day for hearing God's Word.

a. A day for public worship (hearing the Word, praying and singing?) is necessary for the sake of good order.

Since God did not set aside a time when we New Testament Christians are to worship, it is obvious that the church must then choose a day. That is especially true, since our Lord commanded, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40). You can imagine the chaos that would result, if one church body chose Sunday as its day of worship; another, Monday; and so on. If individual families would follow that procedure, the disorder would be still greater.

Therefore the Augsburg Confession (XXVIII, 53-55) has this thought:

Bishops or pastors may make regulations so that everything in the church is done in good order, but not as a means of obtaining God's grace or making satisfaction for sins, nor in order to bind men's consciences by considering these things necessary services of God and counting it a sin to omit their observance even when this is done without offense. So Paul directed in I Corinthians

11:5 that women should cover their heads in the assembly. He also directed in the assembly that preachers should not all speak at once, but one after another in proper order. It is proper for the Christian assembly to keep such ordinances for the sake of love and peace, to be obedient to the bishops and parish ministers in such matters and to observe the regulations in such a way that one does not give offense to another and so that there may be no disorder or unbecoming conduct in the church.

Dr. Luther wrote in a similar vein in his *Large Catechism* (85): "Actually, there should be worship daily; however, since this is more than the common people can do, at least one day in the week must be set apart for it ...in this way a common order will prevail, and no one will create disorder by unnecessary innovation."

This choosing of one day a week by the Church for hearing the Word, praying, and singing in no way destroys the freedom of which St. Paul wrote in Galatians, especially 5:1 (K.J.): "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." If circumstances require it, or make it desirable for some compelling reason, then one could freely worship on some other day than the one which the Church has chosen. For example, this writer's grandfather at one time conducted services at some places on Thursdays and Fridays, simply because he was serving too many congregations to be present at all of them on Sundays (travel then was by horse and buggy). In the days of the 19th century *Reiseprediger* (traveling parsons), church services were also generally held on various days of the week.

Our congregations, too, often have weekday services, especially during Advent and Lent. Dr. Luther would undoubtedly call that a fine, outward custom, since these services aid in preparing us for the birthday of our Lord and for the glorious Easter festival.

Yet, when that is said, one ought to remember well the words of Dr. Luther (*Large Catechism*, 85), that the Church from ancient times has chosen one day a week for worship, and "we should not change it. In that way a common order will prevail and no one will create disorder by unnecessary innovation."

b. Proper conduct at public worship should be practiced.

A writer in *Christianity Today* (6-3-77) complained about

Intrusive chatter in the church...sanctuary during the ten minutes or so preceding the so-called worship service. Some devout people—although they seem to be a vanishing tribe—come a bit early not simply to be on time but also to ready their hearts spiritually to meet with God in his sanctuary. Yet a blustering evangelical glossolalia, a veritable tornado of chatter, frequently thrusts itself upon all comers, pushing the organist into an ever louder prelude. The chatter—about Sally's wedding, or Junior's car, or Phil's vegetable patch—often continues well into the service; hardly to the edification of seeking sinners....

His criticism may be a bit overdrawn. Yet, proper respect for God's House and particularly for the Word that is read and preached there include the following:

1. Arrive a few minutes early for private prayer, reading of the bulletin and the hymns for the day. Avoid chatter.
2. Leave the rear pews for parents with small children or for those who may come late.
3. Move in from the aisle to leave room for others.
4. Help those who are less familiar with the service.
5. Strangers are guests. Treat them courteously.
6. "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise" (Psalm 100:4).

c. The ancient Church chose Sunday as its day for worship.

## 1) The choice of Sunday dates from the earliest days of Christianity.

Members of the first Christian congregation at Jerusalem for a time met daily in the temple for hearing the word, for praising God, and for receiving the Sacrament (Acts 2:42-47).

Later at least some parts of the Christian Church continued for a time to worship on the Sabbath, probably so that no offense might be given to the Jews. For example, St. Paul and his co-workers preached to the Jews at Philippi, where Lydia was converted, on the Sabbath day (Acts 16:13,14). Also at Thessalonica, "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead" (Acts 17:2,3). Paul followed the same custom, when he came to Corinth: "Every Sabbath he argued in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4).

Yet, apparently as the opposition of many Jews developed, the Christian Church began more frequently to worship on Sundays. This custom was a clear confession to the Jews that no one would any longer be bound to observe the Old Testament Ceremonial Laws.

An example of such worship on the first day of the week is written in Acts 20:7: "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul preached to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight."

By the time that St. Paul wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians, some twenty-five years after Calvary, it seems that the custom of gathering to hear the Word on Sundays was well established. At least I Corinthians 16:2, where St. Paul wrote about collections on the first day of the week, indicates that Sunday worship was common. By the time that St. John wrote Revelation, toward the end of the first century A.D., Sunday had already become "the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10).

Church literature also states that the choice of Sunday for worship was an early custom. For example, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, dating from about 100 A.D., states that the Christian Church celebrated the Sabbath in memory of the creation of the world and Sunday in remembrance of the resurrection.

Justin Martyr, who was born about 100 A.D., wrote in his *First Apology*: "On the day which is called Sunday, there is an assembly...of all who live in cities, or in country districts; and the records of the apostles or writings of the prophets, are read as long as we have time. Then the leader concludes and the president verbally instructs and exhorts us to the imitation of these excellent things." He then continued to describe public worship in the early days of Christianity.

Bardesanes, who was born in 154 A.D., wrote in *Concerning Faith*, "On one day, the first day of the week, we assemble ourselves together."

Accordingly, Dr. Luther wrote (*Large Catechism*, 85): "Since from ancient times Sunday has been appointed for this purpose (public worship), we shall not change it." That was entirely in keeping with his philosophy of retaining church traditions, unless they were based on false doctrine or gave wrong impressions.

Again, (*Large Catechism*, 83, 84): "We keep them (that is, holy days), first, for the sake of bodily need. Nature teaches and demands that the common people—man-servants and maid-servants who have attended to their work and trade the whole week long—should retire for a day to rest and be refreshed. Secondly, and most especially, we keep holy days so that people may have time and opportunity, which otherwise would not be available, to participate in public worship, that is, that they may assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then praise God with song and prayer."

To this, the *Augsburg Confession* (XXVIII, 60) adds: "Because it was necessary to appoint a certain day so that the people might know when they ought to assemble, the Christian church appointed Sunday for this purpose, and it was the more inclined and pleased to do this in order that the people might have an example of Christian liberty and might know that the keeping neither of the Sabbath nor of any other day is necessary."

## 2) The Christian church had good reasons for choosing Sunday as its day of worship.

Why did the Church choose Sunday as our day of worship in preference to another day? Pastor C. Ross gave a comprehensive answer in his 1888 essay cited previously (this writer's translation):

1. It is the day on which Christ arose; through His resurrection Christ began the spiritual Sabbath. Now we know that, since Christ kept the Sabbath for us in the grave after His painful work for our sins and trespasses, we partake of the fruit of His painful work so that we through faith rest in Him.
2. The Holy Ministry was instituted on Sunday.
3. On this day the Holy Spirit was also poured out on the apostles, and the Christian church was founded.

For the sake of these great works of God this day is truly the Day of the Lord. It was surely a wise ordinance on the part of the Church to appoint this day for church services. However, it is also a wholesome ordinance. Much discord and disrespect of public services is thereby avoided. Everyone now knows when the time for public services has come, and he can arrange his work accordingly.

Yes, this ordinance is relatively necessary, not, of course, absolutely necessary, since God did not ordain it, but necessary because of the circumstances in which the Church exists.

(Then some paragraphs later): Since this ordinance of Sunday is wise, wholesome, and relatively necessary, besides stemming from the ancient Church, we ought reasonable to cling to it for the sake of Christian love and unity. Although Sunday in itself is no holier than other days, it should nonetheless be holy for us because of the purpose that it serves. If we should presumptuously overturn this ordinance because of our freedom, that would be pure innovation and a state of separatism. Even though we therefore can never admit that the ordinance of Sunday rests on a divine commandment, yet we surely do not want to despise this ordinance. This Bible passage applies also to the ordinance of Sunday: "Whatsoever is right, whatsoever is pure, whatsoever is lovely, or whatsoever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

3. The Church also gradually developed its own year.

a. The Church began developing its year by gradually introducing three major festivals.

1) Easter was the first major festival to be widely celebrated.

Everything that we said about Sunday in the previous section B, 2 applies with equal force to the observance of the Christian Church Year. It, too, is not divinely ordained—there is not a single passage in Scripture that says that we must or that we might well observe certain festivals. Yet, such an observance is wholesome, instructive, salutary, and certainly commendable, as we shall see.

The very first annual feast to be celebrated everywhere within the Christian Church was Easter, a name that is possibly derived from the Anglo Saxon Eastre, the goddess of spring. That annual celebration of Easter may date from the days of the apostles; we know that it was regularly observed in various places as early as the second century after Christ.

One would surely expect the Church to celebrate Easter, if it celebrated any feast, since this is the most important day of all the year for Christ's followers. Everything that we teach and believe in the Christian Church ultimately depends on the resurrection of our Lord on Easter Sunday morning. "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith," wrote St. Paul in I Corinthians 15:14. He continued with "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who are fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (I Corinthians

15:17-19). Thereafter the great apostle reached the triumphant climax of his presentation with these words: "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (I Corinthians 15:20). To celebrate those grand and blessed truths, the Church began to celebrate Easter, the first Christian festival to be widely observed.

While church members everywhere generally agreed that Christ's resurrection should be observed annually, there was a great and lengthy disagreement regarding the date for celebrating Easter. Was this major festival to fall on a specific date each year? Should it always be observed on a Sunday, and if so, on what Sunday? Questions like these were debated in the early church for decades, yes, even for centuries. The Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D., the first great Christian convention after the days of the apostles, supposedly settled the matter by adopting essentially this formula: Wait for spring, then for a full moon, thereafter the next Sunday is Easter. That is the formula followed by almost all Christian churches today. Consequently, Easter can fall on any date from March 22 to April 25. (This formula also brings Easter close to Jewish Passover time, the time of the first Easter.)

However, after 325 at least four or five centuries came and went, before parts of the church, especially in England, accepted this formula for celebrating Easter. Even today, the Greek Orthodox celebration of major holy days may fall upon an entirely different date from ours. The reason is that this church body follows the old Julian Calendar in determining the date for its Easter celebration. Its festival may then vary by as much as a month from the date observed by other Christian churches.

2) The observance of Christmas was probably introduced in the fourth century.

Christmas, the celebration of our Lord's birthday, was not widely celebrated until the fourth century after Christ. The first mention of a regular celebration on December 25 seems to be in the Philocalian Calendar of 336 A.D. In the Western Church December 25 gradually supplanted Epiphany (January 6), the time when the Eastern Church celebrated Jesus' birthday. Many scholars believe that Jesus' birth was assigned to December 25, because this was the date of the winter solstice, the time when the sun began its return to the northern sky. Dr. Luther Reed, an acknowledged authority in liturgical matters, wrote in his *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947, hereafter quoted as Dr. Reed): "We do not know the date of our Lord's birth. In Rome also, December 25 was celebrated as a festival of the sun and in recognition of the winter solstice. Church leaders took advantage of this deeply rooted observance and gave it Christian direction by celebrating the birth of the Sun of Righteousness on this date" (p. 442). Hippolytus, about A.D. 220, named December 25 as the date of Christ's birth.

The uncertainty regarding Jesus' birthday should not, of course, prevent us from celebrating it on December 25.. We frequently celebrate our birthdays before or after the actual date also. Nor should we necessarily think it strange that Christmas, today our most widely celebrated church festival, was the last major festival to be introduced into the church calendar. For the early Christians the resurrection, together with Christ's death, was more important than any other event in our Lord's life. That is as it should be, because of Easter's blessings for every believer.

Finally, we cannot help but deplore the devil's usurping of Christmas for his own diabolic ends. He knows well enough that if people will place enough emphasis upon buying and selling, on bells and decorations, on Santa Claus and his gifts, the true significance of Christmas could very well be kept from many people.

3) The festival of Pentecost, or Whitsunday, was introduced into the Church at an early date.

This last of the three great festivals in the Church Year is first mentioned about A.D. 150; Hippolytus knew about it soon after 200 A.D.

The Christian festival of Pentecost commemorates the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit in richest measure on the 50th day after Easter (Acts 2). The date happened to be a Jewish festival also; it was called the Feast of Weeks (seven weeks after Passover) or Pentecost (a Greek word meaning 50). For the Jews

this was a harvest festival, celebrating the ingathering of the first sheaves of grain (see Exodus 34:22; Leviticus 23:15-20; Deuteronomy 16:9-12).

Another name for this festival is Whitsunday, a word derived from White Sunday. It was so-called because in olden days the candidates for baptism on this day wore white garments. (Pentecost and Easter were favorite times for baptism, especially in the northern countries.)

Thus we have learned how the three major festivals of the Christian Year were gradually introduced. No bishop, no church council, no group of congregations ever issued a decree, stating that the church would hereafter observe these three festivals; the custom simply developed gradually in various countries over the course of many years; eventually it was universally observed.

b. The Church continued to develop its year by gradually introducing pre- and post-festival seasons.

This, too, was a natural development, because the church needed time to prepare its members for the celebration of the three major festivals.

1) The Church gradually developed pre- and post-Christmas season.

Advent (the word means "coming") was introduced into the Western Church about 500 A.D. to prepare the hearts and minds of the worshippers for that stupendous act whereby God took upon Himself the flesh of a human being to save us from our sins. The length of the Advent season varied from time to time, but Gregory the Great (died 604) determined that it should include just four Sundays before Christmas, and so it has remained to this day. Thus Advent can begin on any date from November 27 to December 3, depending on which day of the week Christmas falls.

The post-Christmas season includes all of the Sundays after Epiphany, which is always celebrated on January 6. One might think that the minor festivals mentioned in *The Lutheran Hymnal* for December 26, 27, and 28, the Circumcision and the naming of Jesus on New Year's Day and the Epiphany of our Lord would be considered a part of the post-Christmas season; however, from ancient times, these days have been regarded as part of the festival itself. To understand that, one must know that the Eastern Church introduced Epiphany (the word means "appearance" or "showing forth," in this case appearance of Christ as Savior of the world) sometime late in the second century to celebrate the birthday of our Lord (sometimes also His baptism or the coming of the Magi was celebrated on this date). Paul Zeller Strodsch wrote in his *The Church Year* (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1924):

This day (Epiphany), like Christmas, is one of the immovable festivals, being celebrated on a fixed date, January 6. There is no certain reason for the choice of this date. The East arrived at this date in much the same manner as the West determined upon December 25 for the Nativity, by calculations based on a certain fixed starting point. In this case, the East began with April 6 as the date of the Crucifixion and arguing or reckoning, as the church everywhere always has, on the premise of a "perfect" Life, *the Annunciation* would be that date also, and therefore the Birthday would be January 6 (exactly a nine-month period from the Annunciation to the birth of Christ).

The fact that both heathen and heretical celebrations centered around this date, also have borne some influence: the desire, of course, being to give the faithful a Day to observe which would counteract the influences without (p. 62).

By the fourth century the Eastern Church regarded Epiphany as second in importance only to Easter. However, toward the end of the fourth century, the Eastern and Western Churches adopted each other's Christmas festival and began gradually to regard all days between December 25 and January 6 as the Christmas festival. Hence the time was called the "12 days of Christmas," still remembered in the well-known carol, "On

the First Day of Christmas...." The Western Church, however, generally emphasized December 25 and regarded January 6 as the celebration of the Magi's visit.

The Church for many centuries observed from one to six Sundays after Epiphany as the post-Christmas season (the length depended on whether Easter was early or late). However, in the 1970's the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (TLCW) issued two new lectionaries. One is based on the 1969 Roman Catholic *Ordo Lectionum Missae* with a three-year system of gospels and epistles and a second with a one-year series of readings. Both of these series omit the ancient pre-Lenten Sundays (Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima), assigning these Sundays to the Epiphany Season. If one follows this arrangement with additional Sundays for considering our Lord's manifestation, he may actually observe as many as nine Sundays in the post-Christmas season. Many would probably prefer this arrangement over the ancient one, since it would provide more Sundays for considering our Lord's glory.

One can thus see the wonderful way in which the first season of the Church Year brings us these great truths from Scripture: The message of Advent is Christ's coming; He came in the flesh; He comes today through Word and Sacrament; He will come again in glory. The message of Christmas is that Christ is manifest in the flesh; He was named and circumcised on the eighth day; He appeared as the Savior of the Gentiles. The post-Christmas season (Epiphany shows how the Christ-child grew up and began to reveal His glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, K.J.), through both His miracles and His teachings. What a fine and fitting progression!

2) The Church gradually developed a lengthy pre- and post-Easter season.

As early as the second century A.D. the Church began to introduce a pre-Easter season. At first, it lasted only a day or two, sometimes 40 hours, but in the fourth century a 40 week-day period began to be observed. For example, the Council Nicaea in A.D. 325 mentioned 40 days. That number of days was undoubtedly chosen because of the 40 days that Christ was tempted by the devil in the Wilderness (Matthew 4:1,2) and possibly also because of the 40 days that Moses twice spent on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:18; 34:28).

You will notice that we said Lent consists of 40 week days (the time from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday is actually 46 days). Lent does not include the six Sundays during this period, since Sunday was always regarded as a high, holy, joy-filled day, a little Easter festival. Including Sundays in Lent would not be at all in keeping with the somber, penitential character of the pre-Easter season.

About the sixth century Ash Wednesday began to be celebrated as the beginning of Lent. It was called Ash Wednesday from the custom of the priests who marked the foreheads of worshippers with ashes from the burnt palms of the preceding Palm Sunday. This marking was accompanied by the words: "Remember, man, that you are dust and to dust you shall return," a custom still widely followed in Roman Catholic and Episcopalian Churches. Ashes were a sign of mourning over one's sin (Jeremiah 6:26; Jonah 3:6).

The use of the pre-Lent Sundays, Septuagesima (meaning seventieth), Sexagesima (sixtieth), and Quinquagesima (fiftieth), also dates from about the sixth century. Those numbers all pointed forward to Easter, with Septuagesima approximately 70 days before Easter. Sexagesima approximately 60 days before Easter, and Quinquagesima exactly 50 days before Easter. The ILCW readings dropped these three Sundays before Lent and added them to the Epiphany Season, a suggestion that has some merit, as we pointed out in the previous section.

The pre-Easter Season is concluded with Holy Week, the holiest week in the entire Church Year. It begins with Palm Sunday, celebrated as early as the fourth century in the Eastern church, where there were processions in remembrance of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on that day, (Matthew 21:1-9), blessings of the palms, etc.

In ancient times Christians gathered for worship each day during Holy Week, and propers were gradually developed for each one of those days (see pages 65-67 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*). Many of our churches arrange for services only on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday during Holy Week (Maundy comes from the Latin *mandatum* meaning command; it was derived from the Gospel for the day, John 13:1-15 and the

new commandment that Jesus gave us all, to love and to serve one another, John 13:34). Maundy Thursday has gradually come to be celebrated as the day on which our Lord instituted the Sacrament of the Altar, as the Epistle for the day, I Corinthians 11:23-32, suggests. On Good Friday we gather into our churches solemnly and humbly to commemorate our Lord's agonizing death on the cross, where He made the supreme sacrifice for the sins of the world. Several churches may unite to have a three-hour service (the *Tre Ore*) on this day, from twelve to three p.m. The time is determined by the hours of complete darkness on that awful first and great Good Friday (Luke 23:44,45).

Since the propers (the variable parts of the church service) for the pre-Easter season before Holy Week do not treat the Passion of our Lord, our churches normally conduct mid-week Lenten services. That custom provides a fine opportunity for reviewing and studying those important events immediately preceding or including Jesus Crucifixion. It can become a powerful stimulus to our faith, since Jesus Passion is the only means whereby our sins are forgiven and heaven opened.

The Sunday after Easter originally ended the Easter festival (it was called the Octave, the eighth day after Easter). However, in our present church year, this Sunday begins the post-Easter season. Hence, it is called the first Sunday after Easter (the ILCW calls it the Second Sunday of Easter).

The post-Easter season lasts for five Sundays, Sundays on which additional Easter thoughts are normally considered. That is proper, since the miracle of Jesus' resurrection is so overwhelmingly great, since every part of our Christian faith depends upon it, one can see immediately that more than one Sunday is necessary to consider its message properly.

Thus, the Epistle for the first Sunday after Easter (I John 5:4-12) stresses the thought that "He who has the Son has life; and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life," while the Gospel for the day (John 20:19-31) presents the first post-resurrection appearance of our Lord to the Apostles on Easter evening. The Epistle for the second Sunday after Easter (I Peter 2:21-25) shows how Christ with His sacrifice brought us back to the family of God; the Gospel (John 10:11-16) presents to us Jesus, the risen and ever-living Good Shepherd, who gave His life to save us from our sins.

The Epistle for the Third Sunday after Easter (I Peter 2:11-20) shows how redeemed Christians are to live upon earth, while the Gospel (John 16: 16-23) tells us of the disciples' great sorrow at Jesus' death and their uncontrolled joy at His resurrection.

The Epistle for the Fourth Sunday after Easter (James 1:16-21) reminds us that every good gift comes from above, while the Gospel (John 16:5-15) tells us that our risen and ascended Lord will send us the Holy Spirit.

The Epistle for the Fifth Sunday after Easter (James 1:22-27) shows how we are to reflect Jesus' love toward us by not only hearing the Word, but doing it as well. The Gospel (John 16:23-30) encourages us to pray to our Heavenly Father in the name of the risen Savior.

Thus, we can readily see how each one of the Sundays after Easter continues in one way or another to treat the meaning of Jesus' resurrection for us. The Church chose wisely when it determined that these Sundays were to form the post-Easter season.

### 3) The Church gradually developed the pre- and post-Pentecost season.

The pre-Pentecost season is much shorter than the pre-seasons for the other two festivals. It consists of a festival (Ascension) and one Sunday (Exaudi). In the Epistle for Ascension Day (Acts 1:1-11) our Lord renewed the promise that He would send the Holy Spirit to guide the disciples in their work. He had made that same promise on the night before He died (John 16:7). The Gospel for the day (Mark 16:14-20) does not specifically mention the Holy Spirit, but contains some of Jesus' final instructions before His ascension.

The Epistle for Exaudi, the Sunday before Pentecost (I Peter 4:7-11), does not speak directly of the Holy Spirit's work either, but rather tells how we are to live with the Last Day in mind. The Gospel (John 15:26-16:4) states that the Father and the Son will send the Holy Spirit upon the disciples to guide them rightly in their life's work of witnessing for Jesus.



The post-Pentecostal season really consists of the Monday and Tuesday after Pentecost, as well as the following Sunday. In America, unfortunately, our congregations no longer celebrate Pentecost Monday or Tuesday; in parts of Europe the Monday after Pentecost is still regarded as a holiday, a custom that was carefully observed almost everywhere in years gone by. Omitting these two holy days after Pentecost deprives us of the opportunity of considering the fine messages of the Epistles and Gospels for these days. The Epistle for Pentecost Monday (Acts 10:42-48), for example, records part of Peter's sermon in Cornelius's house, followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles. The Gospel for the day (John 3:16-21) presents to us perhaps the most widely known and best-loved passage in all the Bible, "For God so loved the world...." It is the Holy Ghost who with that message brings us to faith and keeps us in it.

The Epistle for Pentecost Tuesday (Acts 8:14-17) tells how the Holy Spirit came to the Samaritans in rich measure, while the Gospel (John 10:1-10) presents to us Jesus, the Door to the everlasting sheepfold for those whom the Holy Ghost brings to faith.

The Sunday after Pentecost glorifies our Triune God, as the Introit for the day suggests. It is the only Sunday in the Church Year chosen to present a doctrine, the doctrine of Three equal Persons in one eternal Godhead.

Trinity Sunday is a rather late addition to the Church Year—there is a record stating that Bishop Lietie celebrated it about 900 A.D. The idea gradually spread, and in 1334 it was accepted into the Church Year by Pope John XXII.

The new ILCW substitutes "first Sunday after Pentecost" for the Old Church "Trinity Sunday," although its readings maintain the emphasis upon the Holy Trinity. The Old Testament, the Epistle, and the Gospel readings chosen by the ILCW for this day present the doctrine of our Triune God more clearly than do the Old Church Epistle and Gospel.

The ILCW also substitutes "Sundays after Pentecost" for the Old Church Sundays after Trinity. What we call the Trinity season then becomes the post-Pentecost season. There is merit to this idea, since it places the emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit among the members of the Church, and that has traditionally been the message of the Trinity season. Following this suggestion will increase the Sundays after Pentecost by one, so instead of our traditional 22-27 Sundays after Trinity (depending on whether Easter is early or late), we would then have 23-28 Sundays after Pentecost.

A good way to remember the first half of the church year is to learn this poem by an unknown (to this writer) poet:

#### The Church Year

ADVENT tells us Christ is near; CHRISTMAS tells us Christ is here.  
 In EPIPHANY we trace All the glories of His grace.  
 Those three Sundays before LENT will prepare us to repent;  
 That in LENT we may begin Earnestly to mourn our sin.  
 HOLY WEEK and EASTER tell who died and rose again;  
 On that happy .EASTER DAY "Christ is risen" again, we say.  
 Yes, Christ ASCENDED too, to prepare a place for you.  
 So we give Him special praise After those great 40 days.  
 Then He sent His Holy Ghost On the day of PENTECOST  
 With us ever to abide; Well may we keep Whitsuntide.  
 Last of all we humbly sing, "Glory to our God and King;  
 Glory to the ONE and THREE" On the FEAST OF TRINITY.

c. The Church completed its year by introducing various minor festivals.

In the preceding section we did not treat the propers for each Sunday and festival in detail, since they are fairly well known to many of us. However, in the following section we shall have something to say about each of the propers for the day, since these festivals are probably not so well known to most of us.

During the course of the centuries the Church introduced hundreds of saints' days, so many in fact, that most days commemorated two or three saints. The more important of those days had special propers prepared for them. However, the Reformers discarded most saints' days. Dr. Luther Reed, consequently, wrote, "The Lutheran Reformation rejected all saints' days except those which could be justified by Scripture. That reduced the number of days to approximately twenty. In the course of time, four other days were included: the Festival of the Reformation, the Festival of Harvest, a Day of Humiliation and Prayer, and in America a Day of Thanksgiving" (In Canada Thanksgiving Day is the second Monday in October.)

One can readily understand why the Reformers rejected most of the saints' days, because a good custom (remembering the faith and the works of the martyrs and others) gradually deteriorated into the ungodly worship of saints, seeking their intercession with God, and applying their merits to others. All of that was pure heresy, a contradiction of clear Bible passages like I Timothy 2:5 ("There is...one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"; see also Romans 8:34, We must not even worship the angels, to say nothing about the saints. When St. John, for example, heard and saw an angel, he fell down to worship him, but the angel immediately corrected him, saying, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you...worship God!" (Revelation 22:9; see also Revelation 22:8; Colossians 2:18). As for applying the saints' merits to others, that is pure blasphemy, for how can a sinful human being under God's wrath and condemnation possibly help to win forgiveness of sins for others? "There is no other name (except Christ's) under heaven given to men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). (By listing days for commemorating such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Albert Schweitzer, and Toyohiko Kagawa under "Lesser Festivals and Commemorations," the *Lutheran Book of Worship* is adopting all that was objectionable about pre-Reformation saints.)

Both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Article XXI) present the true doctrine regarding saints. The Augsburg Confession, for example, very mildly states, "It is also taught among us that saints shall be kept in remembrance so that our faith may be strengthened when we see what grace they received and how they were sustained by faith. Moreover, their good works are to be an example for us, each of us in our own calling" (XXI, 1).

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession is much more detailed and much sharper in its condemnation of saint worship. It shows that none of the ancient church fathers before Gregory (about A.D. 600) mentions invocation of the saints. It states: "Neither a command nor a promise nor an example can be shown from Scripture for the invocation of the saints."

The Apology also presents the true attitude toward saints:

Our Confession approves giving honor to the saints. That honor is three-fold. The first is thanksgiving: we should thank God for showing examples of His mercy, revealing His will to save men, and giving teachers and other gifts to the church. The second honor is the strengthening of our faith; when we see Peter forgiven after he had denied, we are encouraged to believe that grace does abound more than sin (Romans 3:20). The third honor is imitation, first of their faith and then of their other virtues, which each should imitate in accordance with his calling (Revelation 21:5-7).

Fred H. Lindemann put it very well in his *The Sermon and the Propers*, vol. 3, p. 18: "These days (saints' days) are to be observed solely to the glory of God who graciously gave the church these servants and by whose power great things were accomplished through unpromising instruments."

Many of the minor festivals, especially the saints' days, are not regularly celebrated in our churches. But if these days are observed in keeping with the principles mentioned in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, such observances can indeed be wholesome and beneficial. Every few years our pastors could very well devote a series of sermons to these minor festivals, either on the exact date of their occurrence or on the nearest

Sunday. In our Christian schools teachers and principals could have a series of devotions in observance of these minor festivals. In our homes we could set aside some devotions to their observance. Only let's be most careful that the pre-Reformation abuses do not creep into our festivals of the saints.

To encourage such observance from time to time we shall have something to say about each of the minor festivals listed in *The Lutheran Hymnal* on pages 84-94. We shall do that in somewhat more detail than we did in the previous section on the regular Sundays and festivals of the Church Year. We shall do that, not because these festivals are more important, but to show how their messages can contribute greatly to our Christian faith.

In addition to a short history, we shall also briefly discuss the propers for each minor festival. Those propers (Introit, Collect, Epistle, Gradual, Gospel) are generally well chosen to present to us the main thought of the day. (Theoretically, the propers for every church service are to present one great unified thought, but in case of the anciently-chosen propers, especially those for the Trinity Season, it is frequently difficult to understand the major thought that they are to represent.) The propers are listed on pages 84-94 of *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Some of the remarks that follow are adaptations from Dr. Reed, pages 493-513.

The *Festival of Harvest* is a uniquely Lutheran festival of thanksgiving for the harvest. It is not celebrated on any specific day, but various 16th century Lutheran Orders combine it with the Feast of St. Michael, September 24, or the Sunday before or after. The Introit (Psalm 65:11, 9a, 10b, 1) strikes the proper tone for the day by praising God, who "crownest the year with Thy goodness." The Collect combines a thanksgiving for harvest with a prayer that we might bring forth fruits of righteousness through the influence of the Word. The Epistle (Deuteronomy 26:1-11) is a part of Moses' farewell addresses in which he contrasts Israel's slavery in Egypt with the fruitful Holy Land; be sure therefore, he admonished, to acknowledge God's goodness by bringing the firstfruits as an offering. The Gradual (Psalm 145:15,16; 103:1,2) is a fine response to the Epistle, stating that we are to bless the Lord for giving us food at the proper time. The Gospel (Luke 12:13-21) reminds us never to place our trust in a bountiful harvest, but in the Gospel of Christ.

The *Festival of the Reformation*, October 31, is also a uniquely Lutheran festival, although in the later part of the 20th century some other churches are also beginning to celebrate it. The introduction of the Reformation into various districts of Germany was celebrated on different dates in the 1500's. However, in 1667 Elector John George II of Saxony chose October 31, the day on which Dr. Luther nailed his famous 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenberg, as Reformation Day. That date, or the Sunday preceding or following it, was gradually celebrated in Lutheran circles everywhere. The Introit for the day is from Psalm 46:7, 2, 1, that fine Psalm on which Dr. Luther based his incomparable "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." With the Collect we pray that the Holy Spirit would keep us faithful and defend us against all spiritual enemies. The Epistle (Revelation 14:6,7) records the vision that St. John saw of the angel proclaiming the eternal Gospel to everyone on earth. Similarly God again proclaimed His pure Gospel through Dr. Luther. The Gradual (Psalm 48:1,12-14) praises our great God for preserving His Church and guiding us rightly. The Gospel (Matthew 11:12-15) tells about the forceful advance of the Kingdom (use the NIV translation for this Gospel, since the King James Version can give us the wrong idea).

*A Day of Humiliation and Prayer* falls on no particular date. It was commonly observed in the 16th century Lutheran churches, but it is not regularly observed in our day. It might well be used in times of national disasters, like war, depression or crop failure. The Introit (Isaiah 1:2, 4b; Psalm 130:3) expresses the main thought for the day: God's children have rebelled against Him. No one can stand before Him, if He does not forgive sins. The Collect is a true confession of sins together with a prayer for forgiveness from our gracious God. In the Epistle (Joel 2:12-19) God calls upon us to repent and to pray earnestly for forgiveness; then the Lord will forgive. The Gradual (Isaiah 55:6,7) calls upon the wicked to return to God, who will abundantly pardon. The Gospel (Matthew 6:16-21) cautions that outward fasting is worthless, unless it flows from a penitent heart. Then it calls upon us not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth but "treasures in heaven."

*A Day of General or Special Thanksgiving*. Dr. Luther Reed correctly summarized the history of this uniquely American festival:

Thanksgiving Day is a uniquely American Day established by the proclamation of governors of states and the President of the nation. The Pilgrims proclaimed a Day of Thanksgiving at Plymouth in 1621 after their first harvest. By 1680 this had become an annual festival in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In 1789, after the adoption of the Constitution, George Washington proclaimed Thursday, November 26, a Day of Thanksgiving. Again, in 1795 he appointed a Day of Thanksgiving and Prayer for the benefit and welfare of the nation. President Madison did the same after the War of 1812, By 1828 no less than 25 governors of the States annually appointed such days. In 1863 President Lincoln appointed a national day of Thanksgiving and each President since has followed his example.

By Congressional action the date for Thanksgiving is always the fourth Thursday in November. Even though Thanksgiving Day is an American holiday, we must remember that Israel's Pentecost and Feast of the Tabernacles were thanksgiving or harvest-home festivals, commemorating, respectively, the early grain harvest and the later grape and orchard harvest.

The propers for the day are admirably chosen. The Introit (Psalm 150:6, 2, 1) sets the tone, seven times calling upon every living thing to praise God. With the Collect we pray that we might heartily acknowledge all of God's unmerited goodness toward us, thank and serve Him willingly. The Epistle (I Timothy 2:1-8) exhorts us to pray for all people, especially for our government, that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life; this is pleasing in the sight of Him who gave His Son to save us. The Gradual (Psalm 145:15,16; 103:1,2) responds by calling upon us to bless the Lord for giving us our food at the right time (it's the same as the Gradual for the Festival of Harvest). The Gospel (Luke 17:11-19) presents a sad picture of the nine healed, but unthankful lepers, in contrast to the lone healed and truly thankful one.

*The Presentation of Our Lord and the Purification of Mary* always occurs on February 2, since that is the day after Christmas (the Ceremonial Law set the 40th day after childbirth for the purification of the mother, Leviticus 12). On that day Joseph and Mary presented Jesus, the firstborn, to the Lord, as the Ceremonial Law required (Exodus 13:12-15; 22:29; Numbers 8:17; 18:15,16). This Festival was celebrated in Jerusalem about A.D. 350, but was not widely observed for some time. However, the commemoration gradually spread till it reached Rome in the seventh century. The Introit for the day (Psalm 48:9, 10, 1) tells us that God is to be praised for His kindness to us in the Temple. Both Collects refer to Jesus' presentation, the one asking that we be presented also, the other that we may know God's grace toward us. The Epistle (Malachi 3:1-4) foretells that the Messiah, preceded by His forerunner, will come to His Temple to purify us from our sins. The Gradual (Psalm 48:9, 10, 8, 1; 138:2a; Luke 2:29-32) fittingly tells us about God's loving kindness in His Temple. It includes the *Nunc Dimittis* and instructions for its use, depending on whether it comes before or during the pre-Lenten season. The Gospel (Luke 2:22-32) tells the actual story of the Presentation and the Purification together with Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*.

*The Annunciation* always occurs on March 25, exactly nine months before our Lord's birth. It originated in the East during the fifth century and gradually spread until in the seventh century it was widely kept in the West. Whichever Introit (Psalm 45:126, 14, 15a, 1ab; or Isaiah 45:8ab, Psalm 45:1ab) is used, both close with "my heart is inditing a good matter" concerning the King. Indeed, there can be no better announcement than the one about Jesus' birth to save us. Each of the two Collects refers to the blessed Annunciation, the one asking that we might also know Jesus' Passion, the other that our sinful conception might be cleansed by His immaculate conception. The Epistle (Isaiah 7:10-16) foretells Immanuel's birth of a virgin, while the Gradual (Isaiah 11:1; 7:14bc; Luke 1:28,35) lists two prophecies that pointed to Gabriel's announcement to Mary. The Gospel (Luke 1:26-38), fittingly, tells the actual story of the Annunciation.

Dr. Luther approved the celebration of both the Annunciation and the Presentation and Purification festivals, since he regarded them as festivals of Christ. However, he also wrote, "We (in Wittenberg) think that all the feasts of saints should be abrogated, or if anything in them deserves it, it should be brought into the Sunday service." We can understand that line of action, since the Church had multiplied the number of saints' days, and in many cases associated completely false doctrine with their observance. Yet, Dr. Luther also wrote that he did not condemn those who celebrated those days (provided, of course, that there was a Biblical reason

for so doing, and provided there was no false doctrine associated with such celebrations). This quotation is from Vol. 53, *Luther's Works*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press.

*The Visitation* is celebrated on July 2nd. This festival originated in the Middle Ages; Urban VI introduced it for the entire Western Church in 1389 while the Council of Basel (1421) chose the exact date. The Introit with its "my heart is inditing a good matter" is the same as for the Annunciation. All three Collects praise God for the grace He showed to Mary and asks that we receive the same grace. The Epistle for the day (Isaiah 11:1-5) foretells the coming of the Shoot from the stump of Jesse; it tells what He would be like and what He would do. The Gradual (Isaiah 11:1,10; Luke 1:42,45) is a fitting response to the Epistle with its two prophecies of the Messiah; it concludes with Elizabeth's greeting to Mary on her visit. The Gospel (Luke 1:39-56) tells the story of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, the astounding message of Elizabeth to Mary, and Mary's humble, beautiful *Magnificat*.

*Evangelists', Apostles' and Martyrs' Days*. The Introits and Graduals listed for these days on pages 87 and 88 of *The Lutheran Hymnal* will be treated under the individual evangelist's and apostle's days. Why the heading includes "Martyrs' Days" is difficult to understand, since no separate Introit or Gradual for these days is listed here; the only two Martyrs' Days included among the propers have their own Introits and Graduals. The first Introit listed, however, can be used for any one of the three categories; and we must remember also that, according to tradition, all apostles except St. John were martyred. Early Christians placed much emphasis upon celebrating the martyrs' "birth" (really death) days. As early as 145 A.D. there is a record of the Christians possibly trying to recover the body of the martyred Polycarp and instituting a feast in his honor. At first such festivities were local, but gradually they spread throughout the church. Gradually also miraculous powers were, unfortunately, attributed to the relics of these martyrs.

*Saint Thomas the Apostle's Day* is celebrated on December 21. Why this date was chosen is difficult to say. The first Introit for the day is composed of parts of John 16:13,14; John 15:27; Matthew 5:11,12; and Psalm 27:1,6. It tells how the Holy Spirit guided the Apostles into all truth; how they and we are to be Jesus' witnesses, even though we are persecuted; and how the Lord is our Light and our Salvation. With the Collect we fittingly pray that God would strengthen our faith, as He did Thomas's. The Epistle (Ephesians 1:3-6) praises God for electing us to be His own. The first suggested Gradual begins with Romans 10:18, continues with Psalm 19:1, and concludes with John 15:16. The first and last verses of the Gradual refer to the work of the Apostles, bearing witness to Jesus, but why Psalm 19:1 was included is unclear (to this writer). The second Gradual (parts of Ephesians 4:11,12) praises God for giving us apostles and other forms of the Christian ministry; the third Gradual (Psalm 37:30,31; 92:12,13) treats the message of the righteous who will flourish. The Gospel (John 20:20-31) tells how Jesus, the risen Savior, brought doubting Thomas back to faith.

*Saint Stephen the Martyr's Day* is celebrated on December 26, the date that in some places was at one time observed as Second Christmas Day (see page 56 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*). The early church placed much emphasis upon martyrs' days and it is not surprising that St. Stephen's, the first martyr's, was celebrated as early as the fourth century. (A sermon of St. Gregory of Nyssa, about A.D. 400, states that this festival was celebrated the day after Christmas.) The propers are admirably chosen for this minor festival. The Introit (Psalm 119:23,95 and 109:26), as applied to Stephen, states exactly what his enemies did, but how he, to the contrary, trusted in the Lord and was blessed thereby. The Collect refers to various events in Stephen's last moments and asks that we follow his good example in similar circumstances. The Epistle (Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60) tells of Stephen's great works for the Kingdom and his martyrdom, while the Gradual (Acts 7:56) repeats one of Stephen's last words. In the Gospel (Matthew 23:34-39) Christ foretells that the Israelites will persecute His messengers and that God will, sorrowfully, leave their house desolate.

*Saint John the Apostle and the Evangelist's Day* is observed on December 27. Dr. Reed stated, "The observance of this day, in honor of the beloved disciple dates from the sixth century." The Introit (Psalm 22:22; Isaiah 11:2; and Psalm 92:1) applies admirably to St. John, who was both an apostle and an evangelist, and who, filled "with the spirit of wisdom," preached the Word gratefully. In the Collect, dating from Pope Leo's day (about A.D. 450), but changed somewhat in Reformation times, we pray that we might receive eternal life through the instructions furnished by St. John. The Epistle (I John 1:1-10) is John's testimony of Jesus, whose

blood cleanses us from all sin. The Gradual is composed of verses taken directly from the Gospel for the day. The Gospel (John 21:19-24), from the last verses of St. John's Gospel, foretells Peter's and John's deaths and testifies to the truthfulness of John's writings, (Dr. Luther wrote of the custom at Wittenberg, "Instead of the feasts of St. Stephen and of St. John the Evangelist, we are pleased to use the office of the Nativity.")

*The Holy Innocents' Day*, observed on December 28, was introduced as early as the fifth century. One can understand this, too, since the early Church emphasized the dates of the martyrs deaths. Since the martyrdom of the innocent boy babies took place soon after the birth of our Lord, the choice of December 28 as the date for this festival is understandable. The Introit (Psalm 8:2a,9) states that God has chosen babes and sucklings to confound His enemies. In this case, the babies murdered by Herod's command, became the first witnesses for Jesus to give up their lives for His sake. Since God's will is always good, even though difficult to understand at times, the Introit closes by praising God's name. Both Collects refer to the murder of the boy babies; both ask God to mortify our vices and let our words and deeds glorify His name. The Epistle (Revelation 14:1-5) presents a picture of heaven with the Lamb of God and all the saints, including the murdered infants. The Gradual (Psalm 124:7,8; 113:1) tells how we who have escaped destruction with God's help are to praise Him. The Gospel (Matthew 2:13-18) then presents the account of the murdered infants.

*The Conversion of St. Paul* was celebrated in Rome as early as the fourth century, but was not officially adopted in parts of Germany until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Introit was discussed in connection with St. Thomas' Day. With the Collect we pray that even as the Gospel light shone through the preaching of St. Paul, so may it shine everywhere today. The Epistle (Acts 9:1-22) tells the story of St. Paul's miraculous conversion. Shortly thereafter he began his life's work of preaching the Gospel, to the amazement of many who remembered him for his persecution of the Christians. The Gradual (Galatians 2:8; 1:24; I Corinthians 15:10a; Acts 9:15) fittingly lists four important sayings of the great Apostle: 1) God made him a messenger to the Gentiles; 2) to the glory of God; 3) by grace; 4) for which God chose him. The Gospel (Matthew 19:27-30) is the promise of our Lord that heaven will more than make up for everything any disciple gives up for Him. "Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first," the last part of which certainly applies to St. Paul.

*Saint Matthias the Apostle's Day* is celebrated on February 24. Since Scripture has nothing to say about Matthias after he was elected to take Judas's place, it is not surprising that his day was not generally celebrated until possibly A.D. 1000 or later. (According to tradition he was martyred and his body was hacked to pieces.) The Introit and the Gradual were previously discussed. With the Collect we pray that the Church might be preserved from false doctrine and remain true to the Apostles' Word. The Epistle (Acts 1:15-26) is the actual account of Matthias's election to replace faithless Judas, while the Gospel (Matthew 11:25-30) must have been chosen because Christ revealed himself to Matthias (Acts 1:21) and because this new apostle willingly took Christ's yoke upon himself.

*Saint Mark the Evangelist's Day*, celebrated on April 25, was introduced into the Church during the ninth century, but it was not widely observed until A.D. 1200. This is understandable, since Mark was not one of the twelve, but an evangelist. According to tradition he was martyred in Alexandria, where he was bishop at that time. The Introit tells about writing the eternal Word of God in a book, even as Moses and Jeremiah were commanded to write (Exodus 17:14d; Jeremiah 30:2), and as St. Mark wrote God's eternal Word. The Epistle (Ephesians 4:7-16) is that well-known passage which tells how God gave the Church various forms of the Christian ministry including evangelists like Mark, for edifying the body of Christ. The first suggested Gradual (Psalm 45:2, 1; Ephesians 4:11,12) tells how God gave the various forms of the Christian ministry to bear witness to our great and gracious King. The second Gradual (Isaiah 52:7-10; I Peter 1:25) is also highly appropriate for an evangelist's day, telling that the eternal Word of the Lord is revealed through His messengers. The Gospel for the day (Luke 10:1-9) tells the story of the sending of the seventy, two by two, to preach the good news of Christ's coming. We have no way of knowing if Mark was one of these seventy, but certainly he later did the work of a faithful evangelist.

*Saint Philip and Saint James the Apostles' Day* is celebrated on May 1. Dr. Reed wrote: "This combined feast is Roman in origin....The combination and the date seem to have been determined by the fact that the Church of the Holy Apostles in Rome, built A.D. 350, was rebuilt in the sixth century and rededicated May 1,

A.D. 561, on which occasion the relics of the two apostles were transferred to the church which was now rededicated to their honor." This James is the son of Alphaeus, sometimes called James the Less (Matthew 10:3), not the brother of John. The day should therefore probably be called St. Philip and St. James the Less the Apostles' Day. The Introit and the Gradual for the day were previously discussed. The Collect asks that, just as Jesus revealed Himself to the apostles Philip and James, so we might know Him also as our only Savior. The Epistle (Ephesians 2:19-22), as Dr. Reed wrote, "refers to the church as being built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone, a passage which led the Medieval Church to give apostles' days equal honor with Sundays." In the Gospel (John 14:1-14), a part of Jesus' farewell address, He points to the eternal mansions that He will prepare, and He answers Philip's request: "Show us the Father."

*The Nativity of John the Baptist* is celebrated on June 24<sup>th</sup>. It is a festival that was introduced into the Christian church at an early date. Dr. Reed wrote: "This festival is of Western origin....Augustine refers to it in the fourth century and cites the agreement between John 3:30 'He must increase, but I must decrease' and the astronomical fact that after this mid-summer feast the days become shorter while after Christmas they become longer." We know too that John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus' birth (Luke 1:5-26), which must have been the reason for choosing June 24 as this festival. The Introit (Isaiah 40:2,5; Psalm 92:1) excellently introduces the major thoughts of the day, referring to the prophecy of John as the "voice crying in the wilderness," through whom the glory of the Lord will be revealed, something that calls for our thankfulness. All three of the suggested Collects mention the work of John the Baptist as Jesus' forerunner. The first asks us to cling to his witness; the second asks that we might know Christ's salvation and might serve Him in righteousness; the third asks that we might have everlasting life. The Epistle is that vivid prophecy (Isaiah 40:1-5) of John's work, while the Gradual (Jeremiah 1:5,9; Isaiah 40:3; compare Mark 1:3) tells how God chose John before his birth to be Jesus' ambassador. The Gospel (Luke 1:57-80) tells the story of John's birth, circumcision, and naming, together with Zacharias's famed *Benedictus*, still used in our Matin services.

*Saint Peter and Saint Paul the Apostles' Day* is celebrated on June 29. Dr. Reed wrote: "This is one of the oldest saints days, its observance beginning early in the 4th century. In ancient Rome it was regarded as the greatest feast of the year except Christmas....The two great apostles have been associated in Christian thought and worship from earliest times. Their apostleships embraced the church's complete ministry to both the Jewish and the Gentile worlds. There also was a tradition that they were martyred on the same day, though in different years, and that their bodies were removed to the catacombs on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, in the year 258....This established the date of the combined feast. Later in Rome, when two great basilicas were erected in honor of these apostles, Peter particularly was commemorated on June 29<sup>th</sup> and Paul on June 30<sup>th</sup>....The Lutheran calendars retained the traditional combination."

The Introit has been previously treated. With the Collect we pray that, like the Apostles Peter and Paul, we too might be faithful until death. The Epistle (Acts 12:1-11) says nothing about Paul, but tells the story of Peter's imprisonment and his miraculous release by the angel of the Lord. The Gradual has two sentences from Paul's life (I Timothy 4:6,7), stating that Paul was ready for death, having kept the faith, and Psalm 21:3, which states that God met him with a crown of pure gold (read "meetest," not "preventest," as in the King James Version). The Gospel (Matthew 16:13-20) again says nothing about St. Paul, but has that excellent confession of St. Peter, which certainly was St. Paul's also, "Thou (Jesus) art the Christ, the Son of the Living God"; that is the faith on which Christ builds His Church.

*Saint Mar Magdalene's Day* is celebrated on July 22. It is surely fitting that a day be set aside to remember this outstanding woman, whom Jesus had cured of seven devils, since Scripture has much to say about her (see Luke 8:1-3; Matthew 27:56,61; Mark 16:1,9; John 20:1,2,11,12). Yet, strangely, none of the propers refer to her directly. The Introit (Psalm 119:95,96, 1), for example, states that the Word protects against spiritual enemies and results in blessings for those who walk in it. In the Collect (it does not mention Mary) we ask that we might receive Christ's sacrifice in faith and follow the example of His holy life. The Epistle (Proverbs 31:10-31) is the longest and finest section in all the Bible that describes a godly housewife and mother. The Gradual (Psalm 45:10,11; Proverbs 31:10) first uses the picture of a bride leaving her house for her

husband's to foreshadow the marriage of the Lamb with His bride, the Church, and then repeats the first verse of the Epistle. The Gospel (Luke 7:36-50) is the story of the sinful, but repentant woman, who repeatedly washed Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and was forgiven, despite opposition from the Pharisees. It seems as if the people who chose the propers regarded Mary as this woman, but there is no Scriptural justification whatsoever for the thought that Mary Magdalene was a repentant prostitute.

*Saint James the Elder the Apostle's Day* is observed on July 25<sup>th</sup> because, as Dr. Reed suggests, it "presumably recalls the later 'translation' of his body...to Compostilla in Spain....The feast does not antedate the eighth or ninth century." St. James is called the Elder possibly because his name is generally mentioned first when it is coupled with that of St. John, his brother (see Mark 1:19,20; 3:17; 5:37; 9:2; 10:35; 14:33). St. James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1,2), the only death of an apostle mentioned in Scripture. The Introit and Gradual for the day have been discussed previously. In the Collect we pray that we might follow the Lord Jesus as readily as St. James did. The Epistle (Romans 8:28-39) is that fine section which tells us how all things work together for the good of us whom God chose as His own, and that nothing, not even persecution or the sword, shall be able to separate us from our Lord. It is a section that receives added meaning when considered on Saint James the Elder the Apostle's Day. The Gospel (Matthew 20:20-28) tells how Salome (compare Matthew 27:56 with Mark 15:40) requested the position of honor for her two sons, James and John, and Jesus' reply, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant."

*Saint Bartholomew the Apostle's Day* is observed on August 24, Dr. Reed wrote, "This is an Eastern feast introduced in the West about the eighth century. The date, August 24, is supposed to recall the removal by the Emperor Anastasius of the saint's bones to Daros on the borders of Mesopotamia, A.D. 500." The Introit (II Timothy 1:12b, 8a; Psalm 139:1,2a) is St. Paul's firm conviction that God will take him to heaven; the Lord knows that is his faith. With the Collect we pray that, just as God chose St. Bartholomew to preach the Gospel, He might continue to give the Church faithful proclaimers of that same Gospel. The Epistle (II Corinthians 4:7-10) tells how we who are continually persecuted have the Gospel, that great treasure, to proclaim. The Gradual tells how God's chosen ones have proclaimed the Gospel everywhere. The Gospel (Luke 22:24-30) records the strife among the Apostles regarding who of them was the greatest together with Jesus' outstanding reply, "Ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve" (K.J.). That Gospel does not refer directly to Bartholomew (Scripture says very little about Bartholomew); it applies to all of us.

*Saint Matthew the Apostle and the Evangelist's Day*, This festival, celebrated on September 21, is of Eastern origin. The Introit and the Gradual have been treated previously. With the Collect we pray that, like Saint Matthew, we might forsake all covetous desires for riches to follow Jesus. The Epistle (Ephesians 4:7-14, the same as for St. Mark's Day, except that it does not include verses 15 and 16) is that fine passage which tells us how our God gave His Church various forms of the Christian ministry, including apostles and evangelists (Matthew was both). The Gospel (Matthew 9:9-13) is the account of Matthew's call, his dinner for Jesus, and especially Jesus' outstanding reply to the Pharisees' complaint that He was associating with sinners.

*Saint Michael's and All Angels' Day* is celebrated on September 29. Feasts in honor of the angels developed at an early date, especially in the East, where many churches were dedicated to Michael, the only one called an archangel in Scripture (Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1; Jude 9; Revelation 12:7). Dr. Reed wrote: "This feast which commemorates this event, and which eventually regarded Michael as representative of all angels, gradually spread throughout the West. The Council of Mainz introduced it A.D. 831 and the popularity of the 'warrior saint' in Teutonic lands is shown by the large number of churches which bear his name....The term 'all angels' is an Anglican addition at the time of the Reformation." When we learn that angels are mentioned some 275 times in Scripture, when we realize that evil angels continually try to harm and to destroy us and good angels play a vital part in protecting us, when we recall that *The Lutheran Hymnal* has four excellent hymns about angels (254-257), then we surely can understand the reason for setting aside one day of the year to consider them and their work.

The Introit (Psalm 103:20,22, 1) excellently sets the tone for the day, calling on both us and the angels to bless the Lord. With the Collect we pray that the angels who always serve God, may also defend us. The Epistle



(Revelation 12:7-12) portrays, in picture language, Christ's victory over Satan: "Michael and his angels fought against the dragon." The Gradual (Psalm 90:11; 103:1; Isaiah 6:3) is a fitting response to the Epistle, telling that the angels serve both man and God. Therefore, "Bless His holy name," The Gospel (Matthew 18:1-11) speaks of little children whose "angels always see the face of My (Jesus') Father in heaven."

*Saint Luke the Evangelist's Day* is October 18, Dr. Reed wrote: "Luke was commemorated first in the East. He was the last of the evangelists to be honored with a festival in Rome and this was not until the tenth century." The Introit and Gradual were treated previously. In the Collect we pray that just as God called St. Luke to be an evangelist and a physician of souls, He will heal our souls through His Word. The Epistle (II Timothy 4:5-15) is particularly well-chosen. St. Paul wrote those words shortly before his death. With them he admonished, "Do the work of an evangelist"; he was "now ready to be offered"; he was alone in a Roman prison, with only Luke for company. The Gospel (Luke 10:1-9) tells about sending of the seventy evangelists to preach the Gospel, of whom St. Luke may have been one. (The Gospel is the same as that for St. Mark's Day.)

*St. Simon and St. Jude the Apostles' Day* is celebrated on October 28. Dr. Reed wrote: "There is a tradition that...they labored together in Persia and were martyred there on the same day. The festival is of late (ninth century) origin." The Introit, Collect and Gradual were previously treated. The Epistle, strangely, is not from Jude, but from I Peter 1:3-9. It is that fine section which speaks of God who has given us a "living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade," The Gospel (John 15:17-21) admonishes us to love one another, in the face of the certain hatred of the world.

*All Saints' Day*, November 1, was widely celebrated during the ninth century, although its origin, in the fourth century is somewhat uncertain. Services were conducted commemorating all martyrs and later (about the seventh century) also non-martyrs, called saints for one reason or another. The festival recalls the memories of all the Christian dead, something like the *Totenfest* (the festival of the dead), at one time observed on the last Sunday after Trinity in various Lutheran churches. All of the propers are excellently chosen. The Introit (Revelation 7:9,10; Psalm 33:1), for example, presents a picture of the redeemed saints in heaven praising God and calls upon us to rejoice and praise our God for saving these souls. With the Collect we ask God, who has united the Church Militant with the Church Triumphant, that He may graciously guide us to follow the examples of the saints and be saved. The Epistle (Revelation 7:2-17) shows us the complete number of the redeemed in heaven, their praises of God, and their eternal blessings, all by the grace of the Lamb of God. The Gradual (Psalm 34:9,10b; Matthew 11:28) tells of the blessings of all the saints who hear the Lord, seek Him, and come to Him. The Gospel (Matthew 5:1-12) is the familiar Beatitudes that tell the blessings of the saints who live their faith in this world.

*St. Andrew the Apostle's Day* is observed on November 30. Dr. Reed wrote: "This feast was observed in the fourth century by the Eastern church and in the sixth century in Rome and elsewhere. Andrew and John were the first apostles to follow Christ....Tradition states that he (Andrew) was martyred November 30 on a special kind of cross (in the form of an X) which has ever since borne his name." The Introit and the Gradual have been discussed previously. With the Collect we pray that, even as Andrew obeyed Christ's call, we might be given the grace to follow his example. The Epistle (Romans 10:10-18) speaks of the believers who have come to faith through the Word preached by the called ministers. The Gospel (Matthew 4:18-22) tells how Jesus called Andrew and three others to become fishers of men.

*Dedication of a Church*. The Introit (Genesis 28:17b; Psalm 93:1) tells us that almighty God is in His Church. With the Collect we pray that God, who entered this church with His Word, may continually dwell among us with His Word and Sacrament. The Epistle (Revelation 21:1-5) is a part of that lovely picture of heaven, seen by St. John, where God dwells in totally indescribable glory. The Gradual (Exodus 20:24b; Psalm 84:1,3) records the promise that God will bless us wherever He records His Name, and therefore we long for His tabernacle or house. The Gospel (Luke 19:1-10) tells how Jesus brought salvation to Zacchaeus's house. In like manner he will bless this house.

*Mission Festival*. The propers for this festival were chosen and added after the original publication date of *The Lutheran Hymnal*. The Introit (Psalm 66:4, 1, 2) calls upon all the earth to sing the praises of our most

high God. With the Collect we who believe in God pray that we may confess and glorify Him so that His saving grace in Christ might be known among all nations. The propers give us a choice of Epistles: Romans 10:8-13 speaks about sending God's messengers to save many souls with the Gospel; Isaiah 13:2-4 calls upon us to lift the Gospel banner high; Isaiah 42:1-12 is that fine passage which treats Christ's office and calls upon us to spread His praise far and wide; Isaiah 49:1-6 prophesies that Christ will be a light for Jew and Gentile. The first suggested Gradual (the same as for the First Sunday after Epiphany, Psalm 72:18,19a, 3; 100:1,2a) praises God for His wonderful acts in saving us; therefore let everyone gladly serve the Lord. The second suggested Gradual (for the Second Sunday after Epiphany; Psalm 107:20,21; 148:2) calls upon men and angels to praise God for His healing Word, the Gospel. The third suggested Gradual (Third Sunday after Epiphany; Psalm 102:15,16; 97:1) speaks about the heathen fearing the Lord and calls upon all the earth to rejoice at God's salvation. In the first suggested Gospel (Matthew 9:35-38) Jesus calls upon us to pray for more workers to gather in the harvest of souls. The second suggested Gospel (Mark 4:26-32) compares the growth of the Kingdom to seed planted in the ground and to a tiny mustard seed that later becomes a huge plant.

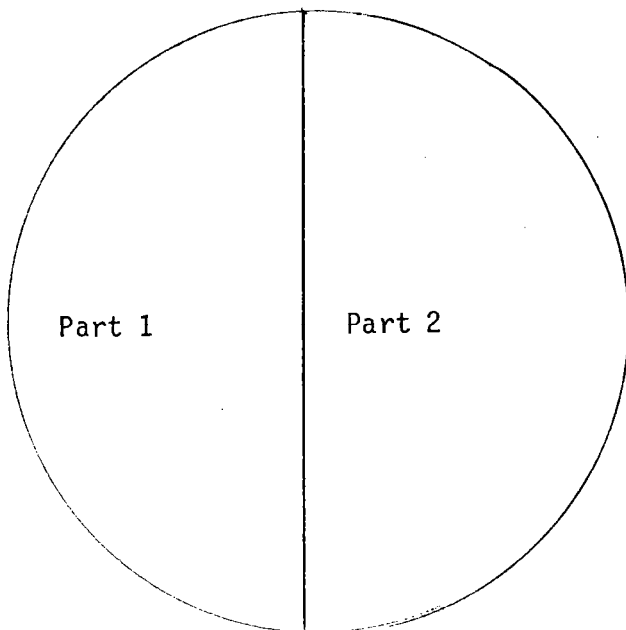
d. The Christian Church Year is logically ordered and richly edifying.

1) The Church Year is logically ordered.

Even though no one or no group of people sat down to plan the church year, (it grew over the course of the centuries), it is nonetheless logically and beautifully ordered. One Sunday and festival follows another in an orderly progression until the entire story of salvation is presented. It is a fine, complete unit.

One can perhaps best understand this point by means of several diagrams. Look upon the church year as a complete circle.

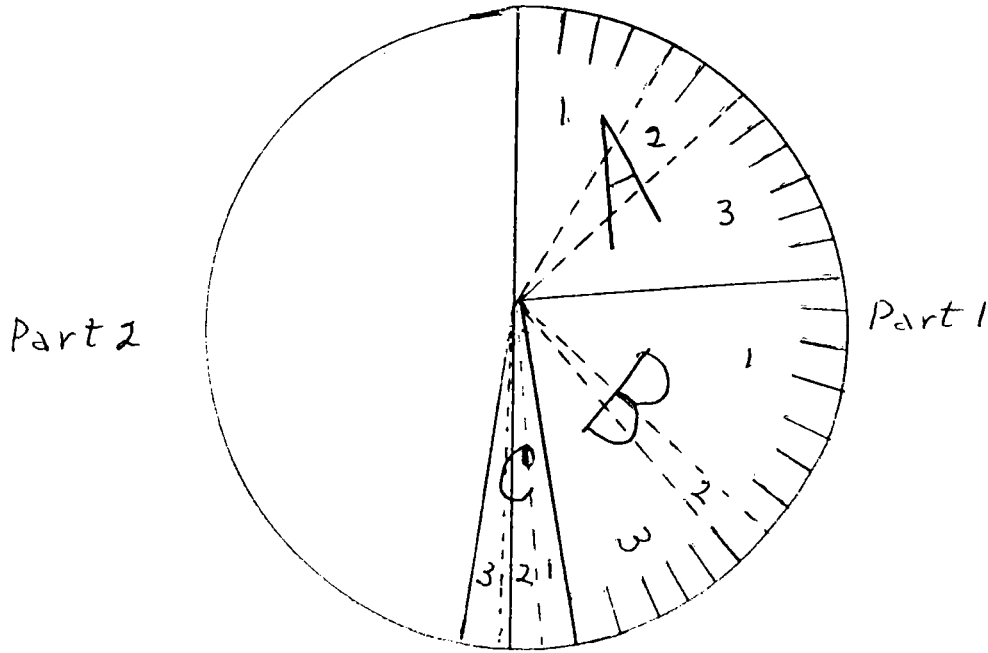
Divide this circle into two approximately equal parts with each part having approximately twenty-six Sundays, depending on whether Easter is early or late.



Part 1 then tells of God's grace in Christ, centering upon the major facets of His perfect life, the promise of His coming, His birth, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit. It is the half year of our Lord, telling us everything that Christ did and does for us.

Part 2 is the Trinity Season, sometimes called the non-festival half of the Church year (because it has no major church festivals). It is the half year of the Church in which we hear how the Church thankfully responds to the blessings received in the first half of the Church year. It is primarily the time when we hear how the Church is to live in the service of our Master.

This diagram gives one a picture of the first half of the Church Year (the diagram shows 28 Sundays, but there may be more or less, depending on the length of the Epiphany Season).



#### A. Christmas Season

1. Pre-Christmas, called Advent, 4 Sundays
2. Christmas Festival, 12 days, until January 6
3. Post-Christmas Season, Epiphany, 1-9 Sundays (if one uses the ILCW)

#### B. Easter Season

1. Pre-Easter, called Lent, 40 week days
2. Easter Festival, 1 week
3. Post-Easter Season, 5 Sundays

#### C. Pentecost Season

1. Pre-Pentecost, Ascension Day plus 1 Sunday
2. Pentecost Festival 1 Sunday
3. Post-Pentecost, 1 Sunday, Trinity Sunday

The remaining Sundays are called Sundays after Trinity.

The second half of the church year, called the Trinity Season or the Year of the Church, consists of 22-27 Sundays after Trinity (23-28 Sundays after Pentecost, if one follows the suggestions of the ILCW), depending upon whether Easter is early or late. It is called the half year of the Church, and tells us everything that Christ does in us. The message of these Sundays does not generally follow a certain progression, but it does show how we, the redeemed, respond to the love of God in Christ.

All of the minor festivals are interspersed among the Sundays and festivals of either the first or second half of the Christian Church Year. They, too, show the grace of God in Christ and our response to that grace.

## 2) The Christian Church Year is richly edifying.

This, of course, is the important point; a beautiful, orderly progression is really of no spiritual value unless it be edifying. And who among us will not confess that the present arrangement of the Church Year is indeed edifying?

For one thing, it annually presents to us every major doctrine of our salvation. Every year we review, relearn, and understand in greater detail the major points of God's plan of salvation in Christ for us and for all people. Eventually we begin to know those points as well as we do our A, B, C's. The 1978 *Encyclopedia Britannica* correctly states that the Church Year is "an epitome in time of the history of salvation in Christ."

The second half of the Church Year, then, in general, presents what should be our response to God's boundless grace in Christ. It particularly shows how we Christians express our gratitude to God by struggling against temptation, practicing good stewardship, growing in faith and love, and finally ending in glory through Christ our Lord.

All of these messages, unless we close our hearts to them, will surely aid in building up our faith, preparing "God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12,13).

A quotation from Paul Zeller Strodach (*The Church Year*), Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1924, pp.10,11) summarizes what we have been trying to say. He wrote, "Here, too (that is, in reforming the church calendar) the spirit of the Reformation made itself felt. As the worship of the church was cleansed and restored to its ancient beauty and spiritual purpose, so the year. This structure returns to the form it had before the days of deliberate manipulations; it is cleansed of a great host of Days which only served to throw shadow and not to give light. The principle that only such should be retained as are immediately centered in Christ or immediately connected with Him or serve to His praise entirely, governed the retention of a comparatively small group of so-called 'Minor Festivals' or Saint's Days, even though others had become deeply rooted in the spiritual life of the masses. The purpose of the year was to foster devotion, to give expression to the Church's worship; to serve to instruct, not to govern or enslave. It must be Christocentric, as much when it recalls His birth or resurrection, as when the Church is born, or one of His followers seals his faith with his blood. It is to be not only the Church's Year but her Lord's Year. Considered in this light, the Church Year has a definite purpose in view and is logical and harmonious in structure."

### e. The Lutheran Church (and others) generally retained the ancient Church Year.

Following Dr. Luther's principle of generally retaining those church traditions that were wholesome and edifying, the Lutheran Church kept much of the Church Year as it had developed until that time. It, of course, discarded all of the evils that had crept into church usage. For example, hundreds of saints' days that had no Scriptural basis, the idea that we can obtain merit through observing saints' days, and the prayers asking the saints to intercede for us were all abolished, since they were unscriptural.

The Augsburg Confession (XXIII, 37,43,53,57) correctly states the Scriptural position of the Lutheran Reformation:

Almost every day new holy days and new fasts have been prescribed, new ceremonies and new veneration of saints have been instituted in order that by such works grace and everything good might be earned from God.

Yet there are clear passages of divine Scripture which forbid the establishment of such regulations for the purpose of earning God's grace or as if they were necessary for salvation. (Colossians 2:16,20-23; Titus 1:14 are then cited.) What are we to say, then, about Sunday and other similar church ordinances and ceremonies? To this our teachers reply that bishops or pastors may make regulations so that everything in the churches is done in good order, but not as

a means of obtaining God's grace or making satisfaction for sins, nor in order to bind men's consciences by considering these things necessary services of God and counting it a sin to omit their observance....

Of like character is the observance of Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, and similar holy days and usages.

The Lutheran Church is not, of course, the only one to observe the Church Year. All liturgical churches follow this custom, although they do disagree in various details. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, celebrates many more saints' days than do other church bodies. Yet, one will generally find Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Orthodox, Lutheran, and possibly other church bodies observing the major parts of the Christian Year, as we have outlined them above.

Most Protestant churches, on the other hand, traditionally did not observe the ancient Church Year. That was entirely in keeping with their philosophy of discarding all traditions that smacked of Roman Catholicism. Reformers like Zwingli and Calvin would have no altars, stained glass windows, colored clergy vestments, ancient liturgy, or Church Year in their congregations.

This Reformed spirit at one time greatly influenced church life in England and also in the early American colonies. For example, the English Parliament once passed a law abolishing Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide. (The celebration of Christmas was outlawed in England from 1647-1660 under Oliver Cromwell.) The General Court of Massachusetts declared that "Anybody who is found observing, by abstinence from labor, feasting, or any other way, any such day as Christmas Day, shall pay for each such offense five shillings," a ruling that was in effect until the later part of the 17th century. Yet, Captain John Smith wrote of observing Christmas in Virginia in 1607, and that custom was followed in other southern states.

Even though the celebration of at least the first two great festivals of the Church Year was gradually introduced into many Protestant churches, most of them did not observe Advent, Epiphany, Lent, and various minor festivals. Instead, many Protestant clergymen preached their way through an entire book of the Bible from beginning to end, regardless of the Church Year. (At Christmas time one might then, rather incongruously, hear a sermon on Christ's resurrection.)

However, in the latter half of the 20th century, those customs are gradually changing. Today it is not unusual to hear of Protestant churches, celebrating the major and even various minor festivals, like Reformation, for example. Lent, too, is more widely observed than in days gone by.

Regardless of what other church bodies do in this matter, we shall undoubtedly continue to observe the Church Year, since it brings us many spiritual blessings. Why shouldn't we observe both the ancient Church Year and the ancient Church Liturgy, since our Church is the continuation of the ancient, pure New Testament Church? Above all both aid us in keeping the Third Commandment, as our Lord would have it done.

f. Various colored paraments help to emphasize the main thoughts of the various seasons in the Church Year.

The use of paraments, cloth hangings on the altar and the pulpit, is also an ancient custom. To people who could not read and to those who could, these five, colored paraments brought and still bring messages of joy or sorrow, of repentance or serenity.

Many years ago *The Lutheran* reprinted some pertinent thoughts on this matter as follows:

When the symbolical use of the so-called "liturgical colors" first came into vogue cannot be determined. At first, it seems, only white vestments were used; but in the twelfth century the five are already mentioned.

In the color the dominant thought of the day or season is visualized. It brings to the eye what the variable parts of the Liturgy bring to the ear. In his "Altarschmuck" Meurer thus summarizes the symbolism of the colors.

White, the pure, brilliant white, the unrefracted light, “the color of angels and all saints,” as Luther says, is most assuredly the chief festival color, if color it can be called.

"In the majestic red, the color of blood and fire, the Bride of Christ, the Church—established through the Holy Spirit's baptism of fire, and guarding the testimony of so many precious martyrs and followers of the Lamb that was slain—very fitly cloths herself on her highest feast days.

Green is the color most widely diffused on earth, the earth's every-day garment, the color which the eye can bear in large masses without becoming weary, and which never ceases to refresh. As such, in contrast with red, it is best adapted to the ordinary seasons of the Church.

Violet is a solemn and earnest color. While red expresses a joyful hallelujah, violet is indicative of that composure which should characterize those seasons of preparation of which the color is the symbol.

Black, the opposite of light—the negative pole of the color-scale whose positive is white, needs no comment. It is the universally accepted symbol of the deepest sorrow and humiliation.

The colors are used as follows:

White, from Christmas eve to the First Sunday after Epiphany; from Easter to the eve of Pentecost.

Red, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday, Apostles' and Martyrs' Days, Harvest, Reformation, etc.

Green, from the Second Sunday after Epiphany to Quinquagesima, inclusive; Sundays after Trinity.

Violet, from the first Sunday in Advent to Christmas; from Ash Wednesday to Palm Sunday.

Black, from Palm Sunday during Holy Week; Days of Humiliation and Prayer; Commemoration of the Dead.

It should be observed, however, that the usage is not altogether uniform. Here and there slight deviations exist.

Any liturgical calendar lists the proper colors for each day of the year. Since the use of paraments (and stoles worn by the pastors) is an adiaphoron, one can expect variations on some days.

4. In the course of time the Church developed a fixed liturgy for worshiping God.

a. The form of the liturgy for worshiping God is an adiaphoron.

In Old Testament times the form of worship was divinely instituted; however, every part of the Ceremonial Law was abolished in New Testament times, as we learned in I, B.

In New Testament times we are commanded to worship God, to preach the Word, to sing, and to pray, but the form for doing this is determined only by what is decent, dignified, orderly, right, and admirable (I Corinthians 14:40; Philippians 4:8). There are no other commands regarding this matter.

Our Augsburg Confession (VII, 3) correctly states: "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places." Therefore the Formula of Concord (Epitome X, 4, 7) on "Church Usages" states:

We believe, teach, and confess that the community (churches) of God in every locality and every age has authority to change such ceremonies according to circumstances, as it may be most profitable and edifying to the community of God.

We believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because it has more external ceremonies not commanded by God, as long as there is mutual agreement in doctrine

and in all its articles as well as in the right use of the holy sacraments, according to the familiar axiom, "Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith."

The Solid Declaration (X, 9) makes this point:

We further believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church. Paul instructs us how we can with a good conscience give in and yield to the weak in faith in such external matters of indifference (Romans 14) and demonstrates it by his own example (Acts 16:3, 21:26; I Corinthians 9:10).

Dr. Luther wrote in a similar vein in the Preface to his *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung des Gottesdienstes* (The German Mass and Order of Service):

In the first place, I would kindly and for God's sake request all those who see this order of service or desire to follow it: Do not make it a rigid law to bind or entangle anyone's conscience, but use it in Christian liberty as long, when, where, and how you find it to be practical and useful. For this is being published not as though we meant to lord it over anyone else, or to legislate for him, but because of the widespread demand for German masses and services and the general dissatisfaction and offense that has been caused by the great variety of new masses, for everyone makes his own order of service.

At the same time we ought not to forget that our congregations are one in faith and one in confession. It is therefore appropriate to have uniformity of worship among us, for that would be an outward expression of our inward unity.

The *Concordia Theological Monthly* once carried an article stressing this point. It stated:

Yes, it is true, every congregation has the authority to have its own form of service. Yet we believe that the words of Paul, which apply to every individual Christian, certainly apply also to every Christian congregation: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient," I Corinthians 6:12. Certainly no individual congregation would set aside usages, customs, or portions of the liturgy long established and replace them with new customs, rights, and ceremonies, entirely irrespective of and without consideration of, its sister congregations. Uniformity is most desirable in order that, to quote Luther again, Vol. X, 261 (the St. Louis German Edition), "The unity of the Christian people may be affirmed also by such externals as are not necessary in themselves." He maintains that by lack of uniformity, "People are perplexed and displeased." Indeed, in view of the liturgical confusion in his day Luther was bold enough to write as follows: "Wherever it happens that people become offended or perplexed by such a manifold usage, we are certainly in duty bound (note these words) to limit our liberty and as much as possible to do all we can that the people may be bettered by us and not offended. Since these external orders are of no consequence to our conscience before God and yet may be of benefit to our neighbor, we should charitably endeavor, as St. Paul teaches, to be of one mind, and as well as this can be done have similar rights and ceremonies" (Vol. X, 226).

And precise as our confessions are in defending the right of the congregation to have its own liturgy, they are nevertheless outspoken on the other point, the desirability of uniformity, saying, "It is pleasing to us that for the sake of unity and order universal rites are

observed."...alternations in, omissions of, and additions to, the liturgy should be considered most carefully, and unless convincing reasons dictate and demand a change, they ought not to be made.

In other words, the liturgy is an adiaphoron, but, unless there are some compelling reasons, we ought to be careful about discarding or changing it, for it has proved its worth through the centuries. That is a good principle to follow in all traditions that have been developed by the church. Dr. Luther agreed. He wrote (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 53, p. 22): "It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use."

b. From the beginning the New Testament Church's liturgy has had two major thoughts running throughout it.

While the New Testament never exactly describes the form of the earliest Christian worship, it does have much to say about the contents of those services. For example, the preaching and teaching of the Word was an all-important part of every worship service. One need only to look at passages like the following to understand that truth: Mark 3:14; 16:15; Acts 2:41,42; 5:20; 10:42; I Corinthians 1:17; II Timothy 4:2. Another major part of Christian worship during apostolic times was prayer (see Acts 2:42; 4:31; 6:4; 12:5).

Then in Ephesians 5:19,20 and Colossians 3:16,17 the early Christians and we are admonished by St. Paul to use psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in worship. In this respect the New Testament church followed the custom of the Old Testament Israelites whose hymnal was the Psalms. We know too that Christ and His Apostles sang hymns at times (see Matthew 26:30).

Finally, offerings also became a part of the worship of the New Testament Church, as we learn from I Corinthians 16:2.

About a hundred years after Christ worship in the Christian Church was not greatly different from the time of the apostles. Justin Martyr (born about A.D. 100) wrote in his *First Apology* as follows:

In all our oblations we bless the Maker of all things through His Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Ghost, And on the day which is called Sunday, there is an assembly in the same place of all who live in cities, or in country districts; and the records of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as we have time. Then the reader concludes, and the president verbally instructs and exhorts us to the imitation of these excellent things. Then we all together rise and offer up our prayers; and, as I said before, when we have concluded our prayer, bread is brought and wine and water; and the president, in like manner, offers up prayers and thanksgivings, with all his strength; and the people give their assent by saying Amen; and there is a distribution, and a partaking by everyone, of the Eucharistic elements; and to those who are not present they are sent by the hands of the deacons; and such as are in prosperous circumstances and wish to do so give what they will, each according to his choice; and what is collected is placed in the hands of the president, who assists the orphans and widows and such as through sickness or any other cause are in want; and to those who are in bonds and to strangers from afar, and, in a word, to all who are in need, he is a protector.

Here, then, in the worship of the Christians during Apostolic times and in the century thereafter, we have all the major parts of our present order of service. You will note also that from the very beginning the service consisted essentially of two parts: the sacramental in which God does something for us (blesses us with Word and Sacrament) and the sacrificial parts in which the worshipers respond to God's blessings with prayers, praises, confessions, and contributions.

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession (XXIV, 17, 18, 30, 32, 35, 38) explains the difference between the sacramental and the sacrificial as follows: "The theologians make a proper distinction between



sacrament and sacrifice....A sacrament is a ceremony or act in which God offers us the content of the promise joined to the ceremony; thus Baptism is not an act which we offer to God but one in which God baptizes through a minister who is functioning in his place. Here God offers and presents the forgiveness of sins according to the promise (Mark 16:16, 'He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.' By way of contrast, a sacrifice is a ceremony or act which we render to God to honor him...(for example) faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession...."

Dr. Luther wrote in a similar vein. Dr. L. Fuerbringer in his *Golden Mean in the Liturgy* wrote of him as follows: "When the Castle Church of Torgau was being dedicated and he delivered the dedicatory sermon, he said...'This new house is so constituted that nothing else is done therein than this that our dear Lord Himself preaches to us through His holy Word and that we in turn speak to Him through prayer and hymns of praise'" (XII, 1962).

In our present order of service we mark the sacramental and the sacrificial parts by the way the pastor faces: In the sacramental part he acts as God's representative and faces the congregation; in the sacrificial part he represents the congregation before God and faces the altar.

### c. The Church gradually developed the Common Service.

Like the Church Year, the liturgy, as we have it in our Order of Morning Service, developed gradually over the course of the centuries. We know a great deal about its development, first from the various Sacramentaries of the fourth to the eighth centuries, then from the Missal with its more extensive directions for the Mass.

Unfortunately, in the course of time various evils began to creep into the liturgy. The Mass became a sacrifice instead of a sacrament; the cup was withheld from the laity; there was intercession of the saints; parts of the service became pure work righteousness; and, sadly, the congregation became mainly a passive spectator with its part in the service greatly restricted.

At the time of the Reformation the Protestants led by Calvin, Zwingli, and Knox, discarded most of the ancient liturgy, together with altars, statues, stained-glass, church year, etc. Their worship was purely a preaching service with Scripture readings, confession, Psalm singing, prayers, and sermon.

Dr. Luther and his followers discarded the false doctrine and the evil parts of the Mass, yet retained the unobjectionable features. They realized that much of the ancient order of service was Scriptural, dignified, orderly, beneficial, and edifying. Therefore Dr. Luther in his greatest liturgical writing, his *1523 Formula Missae et Communionis* (Form of the Mass and Communion) simply sought to reform, to correct, and to purify what had come down from the ancient church. It was, however, as Dr. Reed wrote, "intended as a local program and not as a general order for the whole church. It proved to be, however, his greatest contribution to general liturgical reforms" (page 71). (In 1526 Dr. Luther wrote his *Deutsche Messe*, the German Mass, also a fine contribution to the order of worship.

During and after Dr. Luther's time there were a number of service orders differing in details, in various places where the Lutheran church was established.

In early American Lutheran history there was also a rather great diversity of forms for worship, but uniformity was gradually promoted, especially in the years after the 1880's, when the General Synod South and North and the General Council translated and formulated the Common Service (adopted in 1888) on the basis of the best Lutheran liturgies of the 16th century. By the latter half of the 20th century almost all United States Lutheran churches followed the Common Service in their worship. That was true also of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods after the introduction of *The Lutheran Hymnal* in 1940 and 1941.

In the 1970's new liturgies are being prepared that depart somewhat from the ancient Order of Service. Whether they will supplant the Common Service is somewhat doubtful.

### d. The three parts of the Common Service have sacramental and sacrificial elements.

1) The *Preparatory Service* begins with a hymn and concludes with an Absolution.

*The Lutheran Hymnal*, pages 3-52, lists several different Orders of Service. We shall discuss primarily "The Order of Holy Communion" which begins on page 15.

The custom of ringing a bell to call the worshippers together and to announce the beginning of the service is an ancient one. It may have been begun by the Bishop of Nola at Campania, Italy, in A.D. 400.

The organ prelude, used in the church since the Middle Ages, follows. It sets the tone of the service, helps create a proper attitude, and introduces the opening hymn. No other instrument can do this quite as well as does the organ.

Before the service begins. All members ought to be in church at least a few moments before the service begins. That time can well be spent in a prayer for God's blessing upon both pastor and worshippers, reading the bulletin, noting the text with the sermon theme and parts, and reading the hymns for the day. The hymns will generally give one a good insight into the main thoughts of the service. Thus one will be much better prepared for worship than if he arrives breathless just before the opening hymn.

A Hymn of Invocation of the Holy Ghost or another Hymn shall be sung. After the prelude, the organist plays one stanza of the hymn, and we should listen carefully to learn both the tune and the tempo. Generally this first hymn is one which calls upon the Holy Ghost to "Come and bless our worship"; or, "Open Thou our hearts to hear"; or, "Be all Thy graces now outpoured on each believer's mind and heart." It is fitting indeed for us to call upon the Holy Ghost with the opening hymn, since we know that He alone can bring us to faith, strengthen us in the faith, enlighten us, and make our worship acceptable to God, as we confess in the explanation of the Third Article. That prayer, in song, for God's presence and help will be answered, as Jesus promised in Matthew 18:20; John 14:26; 16:13,14. Another kind of hymn may be sung, but it will also generally be one asking for God's grace or possibly praising Him for His blessings.

The Invocation ("In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." This is based on Matthew 28:19, Note: We shall normally print the words of the liturgy and cite the Bible passage on which they are based. In this way we shall quickly learn that each part of the liturgy is based upon at least one and often upon various Bible passages.) While the Invocation was not a part of the earliest liturgies, its use at this point is surely fitting. With it the pastor calls upon our Triune God to bless our service. That is in keeping with St. Paul's admonition, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). Everything we are about to do in this service is therefore in the name of the Father who created us, in the name of the Son who redeemed us, and in the name of the Holy Ghost who sanctifies us. We call for their aid in this our hour of worship. Since this is a sacrificial part of the service, the pastor properly faces the altar.

Amen (Deuteronomy 27:15; Psalm 105:48; I Corinthians 14:16). The Amen, the response of the congregation, is as ancient as the time of Moses; later the Psalmist called upon the worshippers to use the same response; and St. Paul mentions it in New Testament times. Amen is a Hebrew word meaning, "It is true; this is indeed our prayer." For this reason the organist ought to play these notes firmly and forcibly; then the congregation will probably sing it vigorously and meaningfully.

The Public Confession of Sins consists of five or six parts. (If the form on page 6 is used, then the Confession has six parts; on pp.15 and 16 it has five.) First is the Address ("Beloved in the Lord! let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God, our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness." This is based upon Bible passages like II Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 10:22; Daniel 9:20; etc.)

The Public Confession of Sins is a late (14th century) addition to the liturgy, since the church of the Middle Ages laid most stress upon the private confession of sins. The Reformation, on the contrary, stressed the public confession of sins, so it is not surprising that the Lutheran Church developed its own form for such a confession, especially in the days soon after Dr. Luther's death.

We can well understand how fitting, yes, almost mandatory is the confession of sins at this point. We miserable sinners are standing in the presence of our all-holy God. That thought must terrify us, as it did Isaiah

(6:5), because everyone with sin clinging to him will surely be cursed forever when he stands before our thrice-holy God. Terrified we cry for pardon, as did the Publican when he came into the Temple (Luke 18:13). Those dreadful sins of ours must be removed, if we are to come into God's presence. Therefore the pastor calls to everyone in the Address: "Come, let's confess our sins and pray for forgiveness."

During this time the pastor may stand outside of the chancel to signify that he is not worthy of coming before God either, until his sins are forgiven.

The first Versicle ("V: Our help is in the name of the Lord. R: Who made heaven and earth. This is Psalm 124:8.)

A versicle (abbreviated V) is a short verse, generally from a Psalm, spoken by the pastor; the response (abbreviated R), sung or spoken by the congregation, is a part of the Psalm verse or another appropriate verse from Scripture in response to what the pastor has just said. Before the First Versicle, the pastor turns to the altar, because pastor and people are now speaking to God. With this versicle we say that our almighty God, who made heaven and earth, stands ready to help us, in this case to forgive us our sin.

The second Versicle ("V: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord. R: And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." This is Psalm 32:5.) This versicle states our desire to confess our sins and the certainty that God will forgive.

The Confession ("Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against Thee by thought, word, and deed. Wherefore we flee for refuge to Thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Thy grace for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ." This form is from page 6 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, a fuller form of the Confession from that of page 16. It is based on Psalm 51:5; Isaiah 64:6; etc.) This and the next two parts of the Confession were prepared primarily by the Lutheran church, since there were doctrinal errors in previous confessions (intercession of the saints, for example). With it we confess our original sin (no other church order has such a confession) and our actual sins, and then we state that there is just one thing for us to do: Flee to God's mercy and implore Christ's forgiveness.

The prayer for Grace ("O most merciful God, who hast given Thine only begotten Son to die for us, have mercy upon us and for His sake grant us remission of all our sins; and by Thy Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of Thee and of Thy will and true obedience to Thy Word, to the end that by Thy grace we may come to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." This is based upon John 3:16; Psalm 123:3; Acts 10:43; Luke 11:28; I Timothy 1:16.) With it pastor and congregation pray for mercy, for forgiveness, for increase in spiritual knowledge, for true obedience to God's Word, and, finally, for everlasting life. If we use the words for the prayer of grace on page 16, then we are telling God that we are sincerely sorry for our sins and we pray for Jesus' sake that He would forgive us our sins.

The Absolution or the Declaration of Grace ("Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." This is based on Bible passages like John 3:16; 1:12; Mark 16:16; etc.) The Absolution is spoken by the pastor as he faces the congregation, since this is an act of God's rich grace to us, a sacramental part of the service.

The Church has the power to forgive the sins of the penitent sinners, because Christ gave it to all believers (John 20:22,23; see also the doctrine of the Ministry of the Keys in the Small Catechism). For the sake of good order the congregation calls a pastor to administer this office in their stead. One of the times he does this is in the Absolution, where he actually forgives the sins of the penitent by virtue of the power that Christ gave to His Church.

You will note that the pastor does not say, "May our Lord forgive your sins," as if there were some doubt about the matter, but he declares unequivocally that God forgives the sins of the penitent. That is evident from the Absolution on page 6 in *The Lutheran Hymnal* or in the "I forgive you your sins..." of page 16. Just as certainly as the paralytic had his sins forgiven by Jesus (Matthew 9:2), just that certainly does every penitent sinner receive the same forgiveness from our Lord through His Church in the Absolution. This, then, becomes

the most blessed message that any poor sinner can ever hear; it makes us happy and grateful beyond measure; it prepares us for continuing our worship joyfully and thankfully, cleansed and now ready to stand in the presence of our all-holy God. Therefore the congregation responds to all of this with a heartfelt "Amen," which means "Yes, yes, it is truly so." Now the service proper can begin, and the pastor, who may have been standing at the entrance of the chancel, proceeds to the altar for the Service of the Word.

2) *The Service of the Word* begins with the Introit and concludes with the prayers after the sermon.

As early as Pope Celestine's day (died A.D. 432) the congregation sang a Psalm while the clergy entered the Chancel. This Psalm was called the Introit, a Latin word that means "entrance." In the course of time this Psalm was shortened, at first to several, then to one Psalm verse, with an antiphon and the Gloria Patri. Most introits were chosen long before the Reformation.

The Introit marks the real beginning of the service—everything that has preceded it is only preparatory, preparing our hearts for worship.

The purpose of the Introit is to present the main thought for the day, and it frequently does that in a beautiful way. Read, for example, the Introit for Christmas Day, Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter (second Introit), Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, and for the minor festivals (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, pp. 54-94). (In some cases it is difficult to understand why a particular series of Bible passages was chosen to form the Introit for a particular Sunday. Consequently, there have been numerous attempts to improve some of the Introits. It is not easily done.)

The Introit is one of the five "propers" (Scripture readings appropriate for a particular Sunday or festival) in the Common Service: Introit, Collect, Epistle, Gradual, and Gospel. Ideally all of them, including the sermon, which one could call a sixth "proper," should emphasize one major thought for the day. A fine idea is to print all of the Propers in the Sunday bulletin with a short explanation, showing how each one helps to carry out the major thought of the day. A sample of what one congregation did regularly follows:

November 25, 1951: The Twenty-seventh Sunday After Trinity

### BEHOLD! THE BRIDEGROOM COMETH!

The Hymns: 609 - 72 - 343

The Introit: Psalm 24 - page 128

The song of welcome at His coming: Lift up your heads, and the King of glory shall come in!

The Collect: page 83

The prayer for deliverance at His coming: Without forgiveness there can be no hope of heaven.

The Epistle: I Thessalonians 5:1-11

The need of preparation for His coming: The day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night.

The Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

The life of watchfulness for His coming: Like the virgins who attended to the oil in their lamps.

The Sermon: Luke 12:35-43

The reward of grace at His coming: Blessed are they whom the Lord shall find watching.

The Introit has three parts: an antiphon, consisting of one or more verses from Scripture, especially from the Psalms, although occasionally from some other book of the Bible, especially from Isaiah or from the New Testament (see for example, Advent 2, 3, 4; Epiphany and Epiphany 1). An antiphon is a verse spoken or chanted in alternating parts before the Psalm; it comes from two Greek words meaning "voice-over against."

Then follows the Psalm verse which should fittingly summarize or conclude the message of the Introit, although occasionally it is difficult to understand how the chosen Psalm verse accomplishes this purpose.

The Gloria Patri ("Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen." This is based on Romans 16:27; Ephesians 3:21; Philippians 4:20; Revelation 1:6.) The Gloria Patri concludes the Introit. It is always added to Psalms or parts of psalms used in our liturgies to "Christianize" the psalm. Other religions outside of Christianity use the Psalms also. So to show exactly whom we mean when we speak of God in this part of the Bible, we add the trinitarian Gloria Patri, our confession of faith in the one, true, triune God. (Gloria Patri are two Latin words meaning, "Glory be to the Father.")

Introits may be presented to the congregation in various ways: They may be spoken by the pastor, spoken antiphonally by pastor and congregation (the colon in each verse is not a punctuation mark; it simply marks the spot where the second recitative part of the verse begins), or sung by the choir. However, since the Introits are mostly Psalm verses, originally sung, it is altogether fitting that they be sung today. Since they vary each Sunday, it is best if they be sung by the choir. The choir has its choice of various settings, but surely one of the best is the ancient plainsong (so-called because it is very plain music, really a "speech-music"). It is also called Gregorian Chant, named after Gregory the Great (died A.D. 604), who may have codified music that had gradually developed. Plainsong has no melody to it; it adapts itself excellently to the rising and falling of the human voice; it has no meter, no time, no measure; it flows along like a river bringing us the water of life; above all it is simply a vehicle for presenting to us the Word of God in simple, beautiful, easily-learned music, sung in unison. (Various other parts of the service like The Nunc Dimittis and The Agnus Dei, are also plainsong.)

The Kyrie ("Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us." This prayer is often written in Scripture; see, for example, Psalm 51:1; 123:3; Matthew 9:27; 15:22; Luke 17:13). The Kyrie (the full Greek expression is "Kyrie Eleison," meaning, "Lord, have mercy"), in keeping with its Greek origin, was first introduced into the Eastern church, then probably during the fourth century, into the West. If we read some of the Bible passages in which the phrase occurs, we shall note that it is used as a prayer for the forgiveness of sins (Psalm 51:1), for times of trouble (Psalm 123:3), for healing from blindness (Matthew 9:27), for help in times of illness (Luke 17:13). Most often it is not a prayer for the forgiveness of sins. Besides, we have just had the Confession of Sins and the Absolution. Consequently, it is best to look upon the Kyrie as a general cry for help or as a prayer for aid in some specific problem. Our three-fold Kyrie is an address to each of the three persons in the Holy Trinity. Since the Kyrie is a sacrificial part of the service, the minister joins the congregation in facing the altar.

The Gloria In Excelsis ("Glory be to God on high: And on earth peace, good will toward men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee, for Thy 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, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sin of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us. For Thou only art holy; Thou only art the Lord. Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen.") This Gloria is an extension of the chant first spoken on Christmas Eve by angel lips, Luke 2:14. Dr. Luther fittingly wrote that it did not grow, nor was it made on earth, but it came down from heaven, which, in fact, it did. The Gloria in Excelsis (from Latin "Glory on high") comes to us from ancient times, from the fourth century or earlier. It is a grand hymn of praise with which the Church on earth joins the Church in heaven in praising our God who has forgiven our sins and who has heard our prayers for mercy. It is divided into three sections: In the first we praise, bless and worship our Almighty Father; in the second we confess the divinity of Christ, and ask that He will mercifully receive our prayers; the conclusion is a doxology to the Holy Trinity. Since it is a sacrificial part of the service, the minister and the congregation face the altar during the time it is sung. (You will note that on page seven of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, the rubrics state that the Gloria In Excelsis may be said or chanted, indicating that this is an optional part of the service for which another hymn or canticle may be substituted. On the other hand when the rubrics say, "Then shall be said or chanted," as on page 17, that part is no longer optional. The word "rubric" meaning "directions for the service," comes from a Latin word that means "red." Those directions were originally written in red.)

The Salutation ("The Lord be with you. And with thy spirit." This is an ancient greeting, first written of Boaz in Ruth 2:4. He greeted his reapers in this way, and they responded with, "The Lord bless thee." St. Paul used a similar greeting in Second Timothy 4:22, "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit.") The Salutation is a mutual greeting between pastor and people, inserted here in the liturgy, because this is the part in which the sacramental element becomes of primary importance. Since everything depends on God's presence in His Word, the minister prays that the worshippers may correctly receive what God now offers, and the people pray the same for the pastor.

The Collect (this is a word derived from two Latin words meaning to "gather together"). It refers either to the "collected" needs of the congregation presented to God or to the "collected" thoughts of the other prayers in a single prayer. It is a short prayer that follows a certain form. Acts 1:24 with its three parts may have been a model for later Collects. That passage has an invocation—"Thou, Lord"; then a quality of God which is the reason for the petition—"which knowest the hearts of all men"; and finally the petition itself—"show whether of these two Thou hast chosen." Most Collects have two more points to them: The purpose: "That this or that may happen" and the Trinitarian ending: "Through Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end." Some parts of the Collect, especially parts two or four, are frequently omitted.

To illustrate the five different parts of the Collect, F.R. Webber (*Studies in the Liturgy*; Ashby Printing Company, Erie, Pennsylvania; 1938) uses the example of the first Collect for Easter as follows:

Invocation: Almighty God,

Relative Clause: Who, through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life.

Petition: We humbly beseech Thee, that, as Thou dost put into our minds good desires,

Purpose: So by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect.

Ending: Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Most of the Collects in our Church Year come to us from the Leonine (named after Pope Leo the Great, died 461), the Gelasian (named after Pope Gelasius, died 496) and the Gregorian (named after Gregory the Great, died 604) Sacramentaries (service books). During the Reformation many of those Collects were adopted, adapted, cleansed from error, and then kept by the Lutheran Church, although various others were added after the time of the Reformation. Dr. Luther translated many of them. The Book of Common Prayer, 1549, translated those ancient Collects in a masterful way, and most of those in *The Lutheran Hymnal* are from that translation (there are some changes in wording).

Dr. Reed wrote:

With an unbroken use of nearly fifteen centuries by multitudes of believers in all lands, the Collects constitute a very important part of the liturgical inheritance of the church...contributing to the liturgical unity and harmony of each individual service, they also span the full breadth of human need...we prize them for their antiquity, universality, excellence, and beauty.

Two more things must be said: Again and again the Collects have these words, "through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord." That is entirely in keeping with Jesus' statement: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you" (John 16:23). It reminds us that all of our prayers are to be requested in Jesus' name. Then there invariably follows a reference to the Holy Trinity, who is the only true God.

Finally, we must say something about the expression, "world without end" that closes each Collect. That is a good Scriptural expression, as it is written in Isaiah 45:17 and Ephesians 3:21 (King James Version). Granted, that the Hebrew and the Greek may be translated in this way, a better, more understandable expression might be "forever and ever," since that is exactly what the original means. Newer translations use "forever and

ever." Our pastors could then end the Collects with "...one God, forever and ever," as the new WELS translation suggests. That would prevent some people from believing that we are saying the world will never end, which, of course, is not the meaning of Ephesians 3:21 at all.

The congregation responds to the Collect with a resounding "Amen," yes, indeed it shall be so.

The Epistle really begins that important part of the service in which God speaks to us through His Word. Each of these readings is called "The Epistle," since most of them are from one of the New Testament Epistles. Some, however, are from the Old Testament, from Acts, or from Revelation (see, for example, the Epistles for Ash Wednesday, Holy Week, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, etc.).

In the earliest days of Christianity there were no set readings from the Epistles or Gospels for each service in the Church Year, as Justin Martyr, previously quoted, indicated. (In his day there were readings from the Old Testament and from the writings of the Apostles.) By the second century, however, readings from the Epistles were beginning to be chosen, and eventually separate readings were chosen from both Epistles and Gospels for each holy day in the Church Year. (Readings from the Old Testament were eventually dropped, leaving only the two New Testament selections.)

The Lutheran Reformation retained most of the historical readings, but made some changes. For example, the Transfiguration story was chosen for the last Sunday after Epiphany and texts on the last things were appointed for the last three Sundays in the Church Year.

The most recent, far-reaching change in the readings for the church service was suggested by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW) during the 1970's on the basis of the Revised Lectionary for the Roman Catholic Mass of 1971. That revision furnishes well-chosen readings from the Old Testament (thus reverting to ancient custom), from the Epistles, and from the Gospels for a three-year cycle. The three-year cycle, naturally, provides many more readings from Scripture than the ancient one-year cycle, even though some readings are repeated in each of the three years. (There is also a one-year cycle for those who prefer this.) Regular readings from the Old Testament are surely appropriate, since all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Also it appears that the three different readings harmonize with each other better than do some of the ancient church Epistle and Gospels, especially during the Trinity season.

The Gradual is an ancient part of the service, going back at least to the 10th century. The word is derived from the Latin gradus, meaning "step," since the Gradual was at one time read or chanted from one of the steps before the altar. It is an interlude between Epistle and Gospel with the first verse a response to the Epistle and the last verse a link with the Gospel. Generally, the Gradual consists of two verses from the Psalms (originally an entire Psalm was chanted), then two hallelujahs, a single Psalm verse, and a single hallelujah. The congregation responds with either a single or a triple hallelujah. If desired, the congregation may respond with a sentence for the season (see pages 20, 21 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*). The congregation's "Hallelujah" is a joyful thanksgiving to the Lord for the Word He has just given to us in the Epistle. The term "Hallelujah" is often used in Scripture (see, for example, Psalms 122:1; 113:1; 115:18; Psalms 146-150; Revelation 19:1,3,4,6). It is a Hebrew word meaning "Praise the Lord." It, like the Amen, should always be sung vigorously and meaningfully.

During Lent, however, and during the three pre-Lenten Sundays the hallelujah is not sung, since such a joyful expression is hardly in keeping with the earnest, solemn, penitential character of the Lenten season. The hallelujah is not sung on the Sundays in Lent either, even though technically they are not a part of the Lenten season.

In place of the hallelujahs of the Gradual, a Tract is read or chanted during the Lenten season (see *The Lutheran Hymnal*, pages 61-67). This word comes from the Latin tractus, meaning "a drawing out." A tract is then a drawn-out penitential passage, generally from the Psalms.

The Gradual is either spoken by the pastor, or, better, since it is generally a Psalm, chanted by the choir according to one of the fine plainsong chants. This is also the time when the choir may sing an anthem, provided that its thoughts are in keeping with the theme for the day.

During the Epistle and the Gradual members of the congregation are frequently seated. They then arise at the announcement of the Gospel, in reverence before our Lord who will now be speaking to us, often in words that He Himself once spoke.

The Gospel readings climax this part of the service. These readings were also introduced into the Church at an early date, probably between A.D. 400 and 600. One can understand the reason for the early introduction of these selections into the church services, since the Gospels tell us about the life, the teachings, the works, and the words of our Lord, the very foundation of our faith. When the Gospel is announced, the congregation responds with "Glory be to Thee, O Lord." With this sentence we praise our Lord, who is about to speak to us. In medieval times and in some churches today the acolytes or others precede the reader of the Gospel to the lectern with lighted candles, symbolizing Christ, the Light of the world. At the conclusion of the Gospel the congregation sings, "Praise be to Thee, O Christ," thereby expressing its thanks for the blessed Word that we have just received.

The Creeds. Our Lord said, "Whosoever shall therefore confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32, K.J.); St. Paul wrote, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord...'" (Romans 10:9), and Romans 10:10: "It is with your mouth that you confess and are saved"; and Christ asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" He received this excellent confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:15,16). In view of such Bible passages and because those people who were about to be baptized needed to confess their faith, the Church quite naturally developed several Creeds. Probably the earliest is called the Apostles' Creed (page 12 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*), not because the Apostles wrote it, but because it is a statement of what the Apostles believed and wrote about our Triune God. No one knows exactly how and when the Apostles' Creed was written. It may have had its roots in First Corinthians 15:3,4: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." Other major parts of the Creed go back at least as far as Tertullian (about A.D. 200). A copy from Yugoslavia (about A.D. 400) is almost identical with our present text; like the Nicene, the Apostles' Creed has three parts, each one briefly describing what Scripture says about the work of each person in the Holy Trinity. This Creed was complete in its present form about the fifth or sixth century.

Dr. Reed wrote in his usual excellent way:

The Creed is again—after the variable Collect, Epistle, Gradual and Gospel—a fixed element in the service. It is the Church's word in answer to God's Word, the public acceptance and confession in summary form of the faith of the whole Church. Every use of it is in a sense a renewal of our baptismal covenant. Its brief but comprehensive statements encompass "the whole dispensation of God." It outlines and preserves, in balanced proportion, Christianity's fundamental beliefs; it witnesses to the perpetuity, unity, and universality of the Christian faith; it binds Christians to one another and to the faithful of all centuries.

Anciently the third part of the Apostles' Creed began with, "I believe in the holy, catholic church." However, since "Christian" was substituted for "catholic" in parts of Germany before the Reformation, Dr. Luther in his Small Catechism and we in our Creed kept this adjective. Dr. Reed wrote of this substitution: "In following this unfortunate national use the English Lutheran Liturgy loses the thought of 'universality' in its definition of the Church, breaks with the primitive and the modern universal Church, and establishes a variant form inconsistent with its own Confessions" (see, for example, Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, 7, 9, 10; Article XII, 66; XIV, 26). True, but will our people understand "catholic" in its true sense of "universal," or will they feel that we are reverting to the Roman Catholic Church?

The Nicene Creed (page 22 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*) was formed principally at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. (but amended and adopted in 381 and amended again later) to combat the heresy of Arius and his followers. They claimed that Christ was "like" God, but not truly God. This Creed, too, has three parts, each one devoted to one of the three persons in the Holy Trinity. However, as might be expected, the second part on the



person of Jesus states much more emphatically that Jesus is truly God: "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." This Creed does not mention Christ's death or His descent into hell, since these doctrines were not then disputed. Willard Dow Allbeck wrote of the Nicene Creed in his *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions*, page 40, "It is the victorious monument of a great doctrinal struggle in the past. It still carries with it the echoes of battle as it serves the present age and the declaration of full-blooded Christian faith."

Since the Nicene Creed clearly states the true doctrine of Christ's person, it is particularly appropriate for use at Communion services. Historically, it has also often been used in the Lutheran Church on festival days. Apparently it was not a part of the liturgy in the ancient and medieval church until about the eleventh century.

The use of the Creed just after the Epistle and Gospel is surely appropriate, since with it we are saying, "Yes, we do indeed believe everything that we have just heard from our God, who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three distinct persons, yet one divine essence."

For remarks on the Athanasian Creed, (page 53 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*) and its use, see the author's *The Catechism*, pages 34,35. Most Protestants seldom use either the Nicene or the Athanasian Creeds, as did the church before the time of the Reformation. Nor does the Lutheran Church, unfortunately, often use the Athanasian Creed. (Some Lutheran Churches use this Creed on Trinity Sunday, a highly appropriate custom, since no other statement so clearly expresses our faith in the Holy Trinity.)

The Sermon Hymn. We shall have something to say about congregational singing the next section of this paper. Here we shall simply state that in pre-Reformation times congregational singing was greatly restricted, but that Dr. Luther reintroduced it, in keeping with Colossians 3:16 and various other Bible passages. In the years following the Reformation the hymn at this point became the Sermon Hymn, since it anticipates the thoughts and helps prepare the worshippers' hearts for the sermon.

The Sermon. Before the text is read, the minister greets the people either with the Apostolic Blessing, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all,"; II Corinthians 13:14; or with "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:2). In each case the greeting is similar to St. Paul's greetings in his epistles (see Romans 1:7; I Corinthians 1:3; Galatians 1:3; etc.) Thereby the minister indicates that he is the messenger of God bringing grace and peace from Jesus to the congregation.

Anciently there was an exposition or explanation of the Word in a sermon or homily, as we learned previously from the writing of Justin Martyr. (See also Acts 2:42; 5:42; 10:42; I Corinthians 1:17 for the custom in Apostolic times. See also III, B, 4, b.) Everywhere in early church services the sermon was emphasized. It has been said that approximately 150 New Testament Bible passages speak about preaching, a clear indication that this was and must remain the most important part of every church service.

However, in the course of time less and less emphasis was placed upon the sermon, as more weight was attached to the Mass. Dr. Luther re-emphasized the sermon in many of his writings, and so it has properly remained to this day. (*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* properly states, "The chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel," Article XV, 42.) And Prof. Kurt Marquardt wrote: "Good, sound, solid preaching is by far the most important and the most demanding task of the ministerial office" (*Concordia Theological Monthly*, 10/78, p. 341). The sermon is the climax to the first part of the service, serving, as it does, to explain the written Word, to teach, to reprove, rebuke, exhort, comfort, enlighten, and strengthen the faith of the worshippers. It is the major sacramental part of the service of the Word.

The sermon generally carries out the thought that was announced in the Introit, prayed for in the Collect, and treated either in the Epistle or in the Gospel or both. Sometimes, of course, a pastor may preach a series of sermons that are different from the thought announced in the propers for the day, but normally his sermon will stress some facet of the Word mentioned in those propers. We who are the worshippers must, in turn, listen carefully to all that is preached from the pulpit, remembering the words of our Lord, "He that heareth you, heareth Me" (Luke 10:16 K.J.). In our day, when sermons are only rarely longer than 30 minutes, concentration on the message should not generally be difficult. The English preacher Chaderton once preached two hours.

Then he stopped, believing he would tire the congregation. But they cried, "For God's sake, go on. We beg you, go on." He preached another hour. Sermons of three hours were not unusual then.

After the sermon the pastor speaks the Votum, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7 K.J.). Votum is a Latin word meaning "wish." The words form a benediction, giving all faithful worshippers that true peace which can come from knowing that Jesus died to save us from our sins.

The Offertory in our Common Service consists of three parts: the offering of our hearts, our hands, and our lips. The Offertory has had a long and varied history. In ancient times it consisted of a procession with people bringing food and other gifts to the altar for the poor and for the support of the clergy. The bread and the wine were set aside for celebrating Holy Communion.

In the course of many years, however, this became the time when the priest offered the host in the sacrifice of the Mass. Supposedly the priest re-sacrificed the body of Christ as an offering for sin, something that the reformers correctly rejected altogether, since it is shameful false doctrine. Dr. Luther said that we shall omit everything that savors of a sacrifice; the only proper New Testament sacrifice of the Christians is praise and thanksgiving.

The reformers restored the Offertory to its original purpose; they made it an offering of thanksgiving. Thus it, with the prayers is a sacrificial part of the service, a proper response to the sermon. In it we first of all offer our hearts to God by chanting Psalm 51:10-12 (K.J.), "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit. Amen."

Then there is the offering of our hands, in keeping with St. Paul's admonition of I Corinthians 16:2 and various other Bible passages. St. Paul wrote, "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a certain sum of money in keeping with his income." This giving of our money is a thank offering to God for all of His undeserved blessings to us.

It is truly a part of our worship, just as the giving of those valuable gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh, was a part of the Magi's worship of the Christ Child (Matthew 2:11). Our gifts are generally brought to the altar, a visible sign that they are indeed dedicated to our God and to His Kingdom. Dr. F.R. Webber in his *Studies in the Liturgy* is much opposed to elevating the offering, to the singing of "We give Thee but Thine own," or having a prayer of consecration over the gifts. He feels that all of this makes the offerings "a meritorious act and a propitiatory offering," a substitute for the Roman Catholic sacrifice of the Mass.

Finally, there is the General Prayer, the offering of our lips to God. The General Prayer is one of the most lofty and comprehensive prayers ever written by man. Even though its praises and petitions are ancient, the form as we have it dates from the time of the Reformation. Much of our version follows the form of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* of the middle 1500's.

A careful reading of the General Prayer will undoubtedly convince us that this is indeed an excellent prayer. With it we follow exactly St. Paul's admonition of I Timothy 2:1,2: "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." With it we join the Church Universal in bringing our praises and petitions for every class of people before the throne of our God. Dr. F. R. Webber in his *Studies in the Liturgy* (page 112) beautifully summarized the contents of the General Prayer as follows:

This prayer includes a thanksgiving for all God's mercies, especially for the gift of redemption in our Savior; a petition that the Word of God may be fruitful in us; that the Church Universal may be preserved in purity of doctrine, faith and charity; that the civil government and its officials may do their duty; that we may be reconciled to our enemies; that comfort may be given to all those in affliction or distress; that the sins of our youth may not be held against us; that we may be protected from bodily harm and from false doctrine, as well as from an evil death; that the fruits of the earth may prosper; that the children of our schools be blessed and that all rightful callings be given success.

"Special supplications, intercessions, and prayers may be made" also.

Unfortunately, this masterful prayer is not always used in our church services; another prayer is substituted, one that often loses the universality of the General Prayer. If this isn't used at church, then we can surely pray it profitably in our own private devotions. (In services without Communion the Lord's Prayer, the greatest of all prayers, one that includes every need in just a few words, follows at this point.)

Since all parts of the Offertory are sacrificial the minister faces the altar throughout this section.

3) The Service of Holy Communion begins with a hymn and closes with a Blessing.

The Hymn. If there is no Communion, the hymn, the final Collect and the Benediction close the service. If there is Communion, this hymn leads into the second high point of the service, the reception of the Lord's Supper. Frequently the hymn may be from the Confession and Absolution section (Numbers 317-331 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*), since we are acutely aware of our sins, as we approach the Lord's Table. Or it may be a hymn that especially prepares us for Holy Communion, like 307 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*: "Draw near and take the body of the Lord."

In the parts that follow we continue to prepare ourselves for receiving that great and blessed Sacrament whereby each one of us individually receives the body and blood of our Lord under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of our sins.

The Preface includes the Salutation through the Sanctus. To signify that this begins a new part of the service, pastor and people mutually greet one another with the same greeting discussed previously ("The Lord be with you. And with thy spirit.") Two further versicles follow: "Lift up your hearts. We lift them up unto the Lord," and "Let us give thanks unto the Lord, our God. It is meet and right so to do." The first expresses our joy at the privilege of receiving a spiritual banquet from our Lord; the second expresses our thanks for the same meal, even as Jesus gave thanks at the institution of the Holy Supper (Matthew 26:26,27; Mark 14:22,23; Luke 22:19; I Corinthians 11:24). Dr. Reed calls attention to the use of the plural form, "You, your, we, us," which strongly suggests "the idea of 'communion' in the sense of fellowship among the faithful, and of united commemoration and thanksgiving in the worship of God the Father."

There now follows the Preface itself. With it the Church Militant joins the Church Triumphant and all angels in giving thanks to our Heavenly Father through Christ our Lord and in chanting the Sanctus.

The Proper Preface, that is, the one that is appropriate for the season, is now inserted. All of the Proper Prefaces except the one for Trinity emphasize some phase of Jesus' redemptive work for us, an added reason for thankfulness.

With one exception these proper Prefaces (page 25 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*) are easily understood. The exception is the one for Lent. One can understand its beautifully constructed symbolism only after a little thought. It reads as follows: "Who on the tree of the cross didst give salvation unto mankind that, whence death arose, thence Life also might rise again; and that he who by a tree once overcame likewise by a tree be overcome, through Christ, our Lord; through whom with angels..." The reason for the expression "tree of the cross" is to contrast it with the tree of "the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17). This latter tree is the one "whence death arose" for all of mankind through our first parents' fall. "Thence (meaning the tree of the cross) Life (in the person of Jesus for all believers connected with Him) might rise again." "He who by a tree once overcame" is the devil who persuaded our first parents to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. "Likewise by a tree (that is, by the tree of the cross) be overcome," as, indeed, Satan was overcome by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Proper Prefaces, Dr. Reed states (p. 311), "were introduced in the Western Church perhaps as early as the fourth century. Great liberty of improvisation was permitted in the early period. Hundreds of Prefaces were composed for every conceivable occasion or situation. The earliest Service Book (the Leonine Sacramentary) has no less than 267 proper Prefaces." That was about A.D. 450, but later Service Books reduced the number.

There are just nine in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, one less than in the Gregorian Sacramentary of the seventh century.

This writer does not understand why the plural "archangels;" at the close of the Preface, is used, since Scripture mentions just one archangel by name, Michael (Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1; I Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 9; Revelation 12:7).

The Sanctus (from a Latin word meaning "holy"), possibly dating from the third century, fittingly concludes the Preface. Dr. Reed wrote, "In it the congregation dramatically joins in the Song of the Angels. It is the solemn act of adoration and thanksgiving in the spirit of holy awe. It has been called 'the most ancient, the most celebrated, and the most universal of Christian hymns.'" Like the Gloria in Excelsis in the first part of the service, this is the grand hymn of praise in the second part. The text is a combination of Isaiah 6:3 (K.J.), the chant of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory" and Matthew 21:9 (K.J.), the chant of the joy-filled Palm Sunday, crowds, "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest"). "Hosanna" means "save now, we pray." It is an exclamation of praise. So heaven and earth do indeed join in praising our Lord Christ whose body and blood we are about to receive. Note the three-fold "holy" to remind us that the Father and the Holy Spirit are also present. "Sabaoth" means "hosts" or "armies" (Isaiah 6:3; Psalm 46:7). (H. Earl Miller in the Christian News, 5/1/78 tells us in explaining the word "hosts": "The picture is this: we see the devil and his many evil angels as an army ready to attack and destroy us. We are afraid. But then our eyes are opened to see the Lord and His armies of good and powerful angels standing guard over us to protect us against all our enemies. The use of the Hebrew word "Sabaoth" may hopefully remind us of the Old Testament history.")

Up to this point the major liturgical churches (Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox) have similar, yes, often almost identical orders of service. However, at this point the Lutheran Common Service differs from that of the others in that it has no prayer of consecration of the elements used in the Sacrament. At various times the ancient Church developed various forms of a Eucharistic Prayer inserted at this point in the liturgy. Thereby the church was following the custom of our Lord, who took bread and "blessed it" and then gave it to the apostles with the words, "Take, eat, this is My body." Obviously the Lord spoke a prayer before the words of institution, but nowhere in the four accounts of the Lord's Supper does Scripture tell us the words that Jesus used in this prayer. Therefore the Church developed various forms of the Eucharistic Prayer, beginning as early as the time of Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century. At first these prayers were entirely Scriptural, including supplications for all people, remembrance of Christ's life (especially the institution of the Sacrament), the invocation of the Holy Ghost, etc.

Yet, later this prayer began to include, as Dr. Reed wrote (page 322) "Commemoration of the living and the dead, veneration of the Virgin, the Apostles and the Saints, prayers for the departed, etc. These all lead to an embellished form of the Words of Institution, the recitation of which, by the priest, is supposed to secure the miraculous change of the elements into the very body and blood of Christ." Because of all this false doctrine, Dr. Luther completely eliminated the Eucharistic Prayer, and so it has remained for most of the Lutheran Church to this day. Even though Dr. Reed states that a Eucharistic Prayer is desirable, because of Christ's example, yet the simple Lord's Prayer and the Words of Institution, in the thinking of many, serve this purpose very well.

The Lord's Prayer, the very prayer our Lord Himself taught us, is the next part of the Communion liturgy. With it we unite with the entire communion of saints in bringing all our supplications before the throne of grace. The conclusion is sung by the congregation, possibly to indicate that it is a part of the prayer written in Matthew 6:9-13, but is not included in the account of Luke 11:2-4.

The Words of Institution. The institution of the Lord's Supper is written four times in Scripture, an indication of its extreme importance. In each case the wording varies slightly. Our formula (page 27 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*) is a harmony of the four accounts. Dr. Reed (page 340) wrote of these Words of Institution that their use "is more than the recital of a historic event or the citation of authority to engage in this holy proceeding. It is a solemn, corporate act of prayer, an exalted liturgical celebration, in which the worshipping

congregation apprehends and holds aloft the divine promises, claims the divine warrant and invokes the divine blessing."

As the words are being said by the pastor, he takes the paten with the bread and then the chalice, even as Jesus did it on Maundy Thursday evening. Various Lutheran church orders call for the pastor to make the sign of the cross over the bread and the wine, as he speaks the words, but this may be a questionable practice. Too many people may believe that this signing with the cross makes the bread and the wine the vehicle for bringing us Christ's body and blood. Or they may believe that it actually turns the bread and the wine into the body and blood. Both opinions are, of course, anti-scriptural. Whether or not the sign of the cross is used, with this action and these words the pastor consecrates the bread and the wine, that is, he sets them apart for use only in the Sacrament.

The Pax Domini (the two Latin words mean "The peace of the Lord") is really a benediction before receiving the Sacrament. Dr. Reed (page 342) called attention to what Dr. Luther wrote in his Formula Missae of the Pax: "It is the voice of the Gospel announcing the forgiveness of sins, the only and most worthy preparation for the Lord's table." It is the same blessed peace resulting from sins forgiven with which our risen Lord greeted His assembled disciples on Easter evening and later (John 20:19,26). The only reason that authorities can find for inserting it into the liturgy at this point is, as Dr. Reed remarks, that the Pax Domini is a remaining fragment of two much earlier customs: the solemn blessing of the people by the celebrant immediately before their reception of the Sacrament and the Kiss of Peace, regularly repeated in the ancient church as a mark of fellowship. (The Kiss of Peace is often referred to in the New Testament and in the early writings of the Church; see Romans 16:16; I Corinthians 16:20; II Corinthians 13:12; I Thessalonians 5:26; I Peter 5:14). Otherwise it would seem much more appropriate to place it after the Agnus Dei, as some Lutheran Church orders have it. Placing it there would make it a highly fitting answer to the Prayer for Peace in the last stanza of the Agnus Dei.

The Agnus Dei (the Latin words mean "Lamb of God") is both a prayer and a confession, a prayer for mercy from our Lord Christ, and a confession that He is indeed the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. It is based on such Bible passages as John 1:29 ("Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world") and others like Isaiah 53:7; I Peter 1:19,20. It closes with a renewed prayer for spiritual peace. It may have been introduced into the Western Church in the seventh or eighth century, and since the twelfth century it has been a three-fold chant, as we have it today.

The Distribution. Prior to the Distribution each communicant ought to spend some time preparing himself for the reception of the blessed Sacrament. He will probably have prayed the "Prayer before Communion" on page 4 of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, read one or more penitential Psalms (like 6, 32, 51, 130 in the front of the hymnal), or possibly examined himself according to the twenty questions in Dr. Luther's *Small Catechism*.

In the Distribution the minister places the bread directly into the mouth or on the tongue of the communicant. This follows a medieval custom, instituted so that no particles of the bread might fall to the ground (it was falsely thought that the bread had miraculously turned into the body of Christ, official church teaching after A.D. 1215, and still official teaching for Roman Catholics). Anciently the minister placed the bread into the communicants' hands.

As the pastor distributes the bread and the wine, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, page 29, directs the minister to say, "Take, eat; this is the true body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, given into death for your sins. May this strengthen and preserve you in the true faith unto life everlasting!" Again, "Take, drink; this is the true blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, shed for the remission of your sins. May this strengthen and preserve you in the true faith unto life everlasting!" A variation of this formula may be used, since Christ did not tell us the exact words to use. However, the Word must be spoken, since it is the Word of God that makes these acts a sacrament. That is expressly stated by the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VII, 89:

It is not our faith which makes the sacrament, but solely the Word and institution of our Almighty God and Savior, Jesus Christ, which always remain efficacious in Christendom and

which are neither abrogated nor rendered impotent by either the worthiness or unworthiness of the minister or the unbelief of him who receives the sacrament. Just as the Gospel is and remains the true Gospel even when godless hearers do not believe it (except that in them it does not affect salvation), so whether those who receive the sacrament believe or do not believe, Christ nonetheless remains truthful in His words when He says, "Take eat, this is my body." This He effects not through our faith, but solely through His omnipotence.

Since Scripture forbids us to believe that the bread is turned into the body of Christ and the wine into His blood, we might ask: "When is the body and blood of Christ present?" Certainly not before the distribution, as the Roman Catholic Church falsely teaches with its doctrine of transubstantiation, but when the communicant receives the bread and the wine, which are the vehicles for bringing us our Lord's body and blood.

In speaking of Holy Communion (I Corinthians 10:16,17), St. Paul wrote that "We being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." So Holy Communion is, as Dr. Reed wrote (page 351), "An impressive symbol of...Christian fellowship and unity." In view of this and since one rarely or perhaps never is infected by germs from the common cup, it seems somewhat strange that the practice of using the common cup in Communion has been abandoned in many churches in favor of the individual cups. However, one should not think that the validity of the sacrament is reduced by individual cups. The sacrament is just as valid, wholesome, and beneficial, if one cup is used or a thousand.

The same Bible passage (I Corinthians 10:16,17) and others like Acts 2:42 and Romans 16:17, require us to practice "close communion." We administer the Sacrament only to those who are one with us in faith. During the Distribution the congregation may sing one or more hymns, or the organist may play softly, while the communicants meditate upon the mystery of the Sacrament and upon the heavenly blessings received through it.

After the entire table of communicants receive both elements, the minister says, "Depart in peace." This is that spiritual peace that results from sins forgiven, the immeasurably great blessing of the Sacrament. There is no need to repeat the Amen many times during the Distribution. Upon returning to his pew the communicant bows his head and has a prayer of thanks and a petition, thanking God for His blessing and praying that He would strengthen us through His sacrament. The prayer may be *ex corde* (from the heart) or it may be a hymn verse, like 306 verse 7 or 309 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Prayers before and after receiving Communion are also written on pp. 4 and 118 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

The Post Communion varied considerably at different times and places. Anciently there was a simple Collect, followed by the dismissal. After the Reformation there were rather elaborate forms, especially in the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer*. Yet, there is good reason for every part of the post-communion section of our liturgy. One point follows the other in logical progression, and all parts together form a fitting conclusion to the reception of the Holy Sacrament, as will be evident in the following discussion.

The Nunc Dimittis (two Latin words, meaning "Now you let depart") is a canticle (hymn from the New Testament), used also in our Vesper Services (see page 43, 44 in *The Lutheran-Hymnal*). It consists of the exact words (K.J.) spoken by Simeon, when a was holding the Christchild in his arms, as Mary and Joseph were presenting the infant Jesus to God in the temple (Luke 2:29-32). Even though the canticle is found in neither the Roman Catholic, nor the Anglican, nor in various early Lutheran orders of service, one can understand at once how appropriate it is for a post-communion chant. We have prayed for spiritual peace and we have received it from Christ personally and individually through the Sacrament. Now we can indeed depart in peace, for we have both seen and received our salvation in Christ. We fittingly conclude the Nunc Dimittis with the Gloria Patri, praise to our Triune God for His "inestimable blessings." (Pastor Webber wrote that the Nunc Dimittis was borrowed from the Office of Compline, the last of the Daily Canonical Hours, that it was used by several church orders in the 1520's, but it was not adopted by more conservative Lutheran orders for almost a century.)

The Thanksgiving consists first of a versicle and its response ("Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good. And His mercy endureth forever," Psalm 107:1; and elsewhere.) Then there is a closing Collect (pages 30, 31 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*). Even though the versicle is not a part of the ancient liturgy, who will deny that it

is a highly appropriate prayer for the reception of the great blessings in Holy Communion? The first Collect mentioned in *The Lutheran Hymnal* comes from the pen of Dr. Luther in his *Deutsche Messe*. He probably based it on other ancient prayers. (In the ancient liturgies there was not just one fixed Collect at this point.) With this Collect we first of all thank God for refreshing us through this salutary gift. (The word "salutary" does not seem to say quite what Dr. Luther wrote. He used the word "heilsam," meaning "wholesome, healing, or beneficial.") Then we pray that God would use the Sacrament just received by us to strengthen our faith in Him and our love toward one another. The second optional Collect thanks God for the pardon and peace that He has given us in the Sacrament and asks that the Holy Spirit would constantly enable us to serve Him.

The Salutation ("The Lord be with you. And with thy spirit") and the Benedicamus "Bless we the Lord. Thanks be to God") may be sung or said at this point. The Salutation is the final greeting between pastor and people. The Benedicamus (from a Latin word, meaning, "Bless we") as Dr. Reed wrote, "Is a doxology which concludes each of the five Books of the Psalter" (Psalms 41:31; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48; 150), certainly a most fitting way of concluding the liturgy for Holy Communion.

The Benediction dates from the times of Moses (about 1500 B.C.), when Aaron, the high priest, was commanded to bless the people in this manner (Numbers 6:26-27). It is, of course, much more than a pious wish; it actually imparts grace and peace from our Triune God, through His minister, as we conclude this great and blessed service of Holy Communion. The congregation then responds with a heartfelt, three-fold Amen.

For many years before the Reformation the church concluded the service with a simple Ite Missa Est ("Go, it is dismissal") from which the word "mass" was derived. However, beginning about the eleventh century a prepared blessing was used; both Roman Catholic and Anglican churches use blessings today that differ from the Aaronic. However, Dr. Luther suggested using the Aaronic blessing, and his followers use it to this day, instead of a distinctly New Testament blessing like the Apostolic of II Corinthian 14:13. The latter is suggested for our Matin, Vesper, Confessional, and Opening and Closing Christian Schools service (see pages 40, 45, 49, 52 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*). With the New Testament enlightening us, we can truly see a reference to our Triune God in the Old Testament Aaronic Blessing, for it is the Father who blesses and keeps us, the Son who is gracious unto us and the Holy Spirit who brings us peace.

The outstretched hands of the minister as he pronounces the blessing are an ancient attitude in prayer (see, for example, Exodus 17:11-13, where Moses lifted up his hands in prayer for victory over the Amalekites). At the conclusion of the Benediction the minister makes the sign of the cross to show without doubt that this is indeed a Christian blessing. Thereafter both pastor and people conclude with a personal, silent prayer that surely must come from a grateful heart. It may be an Ex Corde prayer, praising and thanking God for the particular blessing one has received through the service, or it may be a hymn verse expressing thoughts like that of number 52 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*:

Almighty Father, bless the Word  
Which through Thy grace we now have heard.  
Oh, may the precious seed take root,  
Spring up and bear abundant fruit!  
We praise Thee for the means of grace  
As homeward now our steps we trace.  
Grant, Lord, that we who worshipped here  
May all at last in heav'n appear. Amen.

e. All liturgical churches follow similar fixed orders of service.

The Roman Catholic, the Anglican, and the Lutheran churches have an order of service that is remarkably similar in many respects. The reason, of course, is that the order developed gradually over the course of the centuries; cleansed of its false doctrine at Reformation times, it is dignified, devotional, and rich in the treasures it inherited from our forefathers. The Common Service is thoroughly Biblical, in fact, almost every

word of it is taken directly or indirectly from some part of Scripture (as we have shown), and it is an excellent way for the Church Universal to worship our great and mighty, merciful and gracious God.

Dr. Webber wrote of the Common Service (page 9): "This specific material knows neither the changes of time nor the differences of race or creed. Exactly the same Epistles, Gospels, Introits, Collects and Canticles which awakened devotion in the hearts of the people in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, will awaken devotion today, in almost any land, and among people of different denominations."

The non-liturgical churches, which include most of the Protestant bodies, normally do not follow the Common Service, even as they do not generally accept the ancient Church Year. That custom, too, is an inheritance from the early Protestant reformers, like Zwingli and Calvin, who laid most emphasis upon preaching the Word, singing the Psalms, and praying the prayers, discarding almost all other parts of the ancient order of service.

In Lutheran circles, too, there has been some criticism of the Common Service. People complain that its sameness often results in a mechanical worship, that the mind wanders, that there is a deadness to it, and that it is not in the language we presently speak.

Now it is true that the mechanical repetition of the liturgy is not only useless, but actually displeasing to God, a sin against the Second Commandment (deceiving by God's Name) and against the Third Commandment (despising the Word). Various Bible passages condemn such mechanical worship in the sharpest tones. Isaiah castigated the hypocrites who mechanically brought their sacrifices, celebrated the Sabbaths, and had their prayers, but all the while committed evil in word and deed.

Of what use to Me are your many sacrifices? asks the Lord. I've had enough burnt offerings of rams and enough fat from fat calves. And I don't delight in the blood of bulls, lambs, or he-goats. When you come to appear before Me, who asks for this trampling of My courts? Don't bring any more worthless food offerings. I abhor the incense, your festivals on the first of the month, your Sabbaths and calling of assemblies. I can't stand idolatrous cults and festive meetings. I hate your festivals on the first of the month and at other appointed times. They've become a burden to Me, and I'm tired of putting up with them. So when you spread out your hands I will cover My eyes so I won't see you. Even when you pray a lot, I will not listen—your hands are full of blood (Isaiah 1:11-15, Beck).

See also Isaiah 29:13, a passage that was quoted by our Lord (Matthew 15:8). Both verses denounce the hypocrites who draw near to God with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him.

The prophet Amos is no less harsh in condemning the merely outward worship of the Israelites whose heart was far from God: "I hate and despise your festivals and take no delight in your meetings. Even if you bring Me burnt offerings and food offerings, I will not accept them; or your fat animals as shared offerings, I won't look at them. Take away from Me the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the music of your lyres" (Amos 5:21-23, Beck).

Our Lord characterizes all God-pleasing worship as follows: "God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). In other words, true worship can come only from true children of God, for the glory of God, when their spirit is in it and when they have God's revealed truth. Our outward form of worship must flow from an inner spirit of love and fear of God. If this is lacking, there can be no God-pleasing worship.

Admittedly, using a set order of service can become mechanical. But it can also be used "in spirit and in truth," for truly worshipping God. Some words written by Elmer A. Kettner in *The Lutheran Witness* (1945, page 87) nicely apply to this point:

An individual worshipper in the privacy of his room may decide to sing a group of hymns, kneel in prayer, and read and meditate on the Scriptures. He could invert the order the next Sunday and change it still further to his liking the next week. But as soon as two or three are gathered



together, there must be some form which they agree to follow; otherwise they will have confusion. This sequence of various acts we call the liturgy.

According to the liturgy in *The Lutheran Hymnal* we confess our sins in preparation for worship. Why should we do it in different words each Sunday? Must a confession become a dead form as soon as we agree to use it regularly? Or what is dead about singing "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost" each Sunday? Is it dead because we use the same chant? What difficulties would arise if we had a dozen different melodies for that doxology! Why is it a "dead" form to sing "Lord, have mercy upon us" each week? Is there any greater need than that? Is there any better way to express it? Is it a dead form to pray the prayer which our Lord Jesus has taught us? Rather let us ask, isn't it a dead form to eat breakfast every morning because breakfasts are so much alike? Isn't it a useless act, a waste of time, to fire the furnace each day? We always do it the same way.

We have provided for considerable variety in every service in the hymns, prayers, Scripture readings, and sermon. Would there be more life in the liturgy if every part of it were new every Sunday? Do new hymns have more life in them than the old, familiar ones?

Perhaps we ought to admit that essentially there is no life in any liturgy in itself nor in any non-liturgical service. It does not live until it lives in the hearts and souls of those who use it. If a liturgy is dead, it is so because it is murdered by those who merely go through the form of worship. The same would be true of a non-liturgical service. Luther did complain that the Lord's Prayer was the worst martyr on earth, because it was being mechanically recited, not meaningfully prayed. Rather than discard the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the rest of the liturgy, we urge that the words be made to live in the desires, will, and emotions of those using them. Those who feel their sins and sorrows, who know the grace of God in Christ, and who have a living faith in their Savior, find the liturgy an excellent form of worship, the best which the years have produced.

This rather lengthy article on the Common Service does not, of course, in any way disparage other forms for public worship. Other forms have been devised and will be prepared in the years to come; improvements have been made in the Common Service and probably will continue to be made, as the years go by. For example, archaic English may well be modernized—for some the ancient, King James English isn't the language of their heart.

Yet, when these reservations are made, it is undoubtedly true that the Common Service, as written in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, is a glorious heritage. It is based upon the thought that every Christian is a priest (I Peter 2:5,9) who can approach God directly. Flowing from a heart that truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, one then that loves and fears the Lord our God, the Common Service is indeed an excellent form for worshipping our God in the regular Sunday and festival services. When that is said, one must, of course, always remember that the Common Service is an adiaphoron; it is not commanded by God.

In the foregoing we have said nothing about the Order of Service for Matins, the early morning service, nor about Vespers, the evening service. The reader is referred to Dr. Reed's *The Lutheran Liturgy* for worthwhile comments on these two services.

## 5. In the course of time Church members composed many hymns for worshipping God.

### a. Scripture asks us to praise God with hymns.

That is evident from a number of Old Testament and New Testament Bible passages. For example, Psalm 81:1 calls upon us to "Sing for joy to God our strength; shout aloud to the God of Jacob!" In Psalm 95:1 the inspired writer encourages everyone to "Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock

of our salvation." Psalm 96:1 exhorts, "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth," a thought that is re-emphasized in Psalm 98:1.

The New Testament is no less emphatic. St. Paul, for example, wrote, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). Similarly, Colossians 3:16 admonishes: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." And James advises: "Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise" (James 5:13 ).

b. In Bible times God's children regularly sang praises to Him.

That is exactly what one would expect from a people grateful to the Lord for His protection and preservation, His justifying and sanctifying us. Thus we read that after being rescued from Pharaoh's army, "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: 'I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea'" (Exodus 15:1; read also vv. 2-21).

The great King David was an outstanding musician, for Scripture calls him "Israel's singer of songs" or, "Israel's beloved singer" (II Samuel 23:1). He made arrangements for both choir and orchestra for the future Temple (I Chronicles 6:31). I Chronicles 15:16 states that "David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brothers as singers to sing joyful songs, accompanied by musical instruments: lyres, harps and cymbals." Heman and Jeduthun were responsible for the sounding of the trumpets and cymbals and for playing of the other instruments for sacred song (I Chronicles 16:42). "All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the Lord, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God...Along with their relatives—all of them trained and skilled in music for the Lord—they numbered 288" (I Chronicles 25:6,7). Later we read that they praised the Lord clothed "in beautiful holy garments" (II Chronicles 20:21, Beck).

We know, too, that the Psalms were Israel's prayerbook and hymnal, regularly chanted by individuals, groups, and choirs. That was in keeping with the promise of Psalm 69:30: "I will praise God's name in song, and glorify him with thanks giving."

Psalms 113-118, composing what is known as the Hallel (a contraction of "hallelujah") were later sung at the Passover meal, as well as at other times. They supposedly formed the hymn that our Lord and His disciples sang on the night before He died (Matthew 26:30).

St. Paul also twice admonished his readers to speak "to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16, passages that were quoted previously). He followed that advice, as we know from the time when he and Silas "were praying and singing hymns to God, and other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). They were in prison at Philippi, when they sang, no doubt to encourage one another in their trust in God. Various other early Christians also followed this fine example, when they, too, encouraged one another with hymn singing, as they were led into the arena to be devoured by wild beasts or burnt at the stake. They must have become well acquainted with these hymns on other occasions.

All of these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs that rise to the throne of grace from the world's choirs, from congregations, and from individuals, even the greatest of them, are but a humble reflection of the praise sung by the choirs of heaven before the throne of the Lamb. And if we thrill to these spiritual songs of the world's great choirs, or if we are enraptured by the words and music of our grand hymns, how do you suppose that we shall feel, when we join the choirs of heaven in praising Him who made, saved, and preserved us?

St. John saw such a picture of heaven and heard the heavenly chants. He wrote about his experience in such exalted language that we can hardly help but join the unknown author of *In Dulci Jubilo* (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 92) with his familiar, "Oh, that we were there! Oh, that we were there." This is what St. John wrote:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang:

“Worthy is the lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!”

The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshipped (Revelation 5:9-14).

James Montgomery wrote about practicing now for the time when we shall join the choir of heaven in his "Songs of Praise the Angels Sang" (Number 35, stanza 5, in *The Lutheran Hymnal*) as follows:

Saints below, with heart and voice,  
Still in songs of praise rejoice;  
Learning here, by faith and love,  
Songs of praise to sing above.

c. The ancient church members composed and sang various hymns.

Professor L. Blankenbuehler, then of Concordia College, St. Paul, presented an excellent essay to the Missouri Synod Convention of the Iowa District West in 1940, called *The Christian Hymn: A Glorious Treasure*. It was reprinted by the Ogden Reporter Print of Ogden, Iowa. Some of the thoughts in the section that follows come from his essay. He wrote, for example, on page 49:

It is reasonably certain from references in the New Testament and in the early Christian and non-Christian writers that the first churches used man-made hymns in their worship, but we have no definite record of them. The oldest Christian hymns in existence are those of the early Greek Church. They offer a unique-contribution to Christian hymnody.

Nine of those early Greek hymns, dating from about A.D. 200-900 and including some that are widely used, are in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (numbers 76, 101, 204, 205, 255, 320, 322, 555, 628).

Of the 46 Latin hymns in *The Lutheran Hymnal* Dr. Blankenbuehler wrote as follows: (page 50):

When the Western Church gained the supremacy in Christendom, the Latin hymn flourished from the fourth century down to the Reformation and beyond. Some of the productions of Latin hymnody are classic hymnological jewels...First in importance among the Latin hymnists is that famous old Church Father, Bishop Ambrose of Milan (died A.D. 397), who introduced rhythmical, melodious congregational hymn singing...Luther praised him highly.

Latin hymns in our hymnal are the following: 6, 60, 62, 63, 68, 78, 92, 95, 98, 102, 104, 115, 116, 117, 131, 160, 168, 191, 199, 202, 208, 210, 212, 227, 233, (236), 240, 254, 257, 273, 282, 307, 311, 350, 361, 448, 465, (466), 550, 559, 564, 605, 607, (612), 613, 614. Of these at least 18 were composed before A.D. 1000; an even dozen were written after the Reformation.

A quick check of these hymns of Latin origin will show us that a number of them are some of the most beloved in all the history of hymnody (see, for example, numbers 62, 68, 92, 98, 102, 160, 191, 199, 212, 227, 236, 307, 361, 466, 613).

d. Congregational singing declined during the Middle Ages.

Even though some of our fine hymns were written before A.D. 1500, yet congregational singing declined so much in the centuries after 600 that it finally amounted to not much more than the singing of the responses, like the Amen and the Hallelujah. The priests and the priestly choirs conducted most parts of the services. Dr. Blankenbuehler wrote, page 50:

After Pope Gregory (died A.D. 604) had banished from the service the Ambrosian hymn tune, because it had been secularized and corrupted, and had introduced for the clerical chorus his new style of singing, the Gregorian chant, the composing of hymns naturally decreased, since the congregation no longer took much part in the service by active singing until the time of Luther.

e. The greatest New Testament period of hymn writing occurred at various times from the Reformation into the 1800's.

We shall again quote Dr. Blankenbuehler (page 52):

When Luther restored again the precious doctrine of the general priesthood of all believers, he restored to the people the use of their own language for the service and gave a particular place to congregational singing in public worship...German hymnody, according to scholars, surpasses all others in wealth.

It is indeed an extraordinary attainment for one man to have given a church her Bible in the vernacular, her catechism, and her first hymnal. With the publication of his first short hymnal, this first and evangelical hymnist and his co-workers started a veritable flood of hymn writing. That continued down through the centuries. Julian in 1891 estimated the number of German hymns to be well over 100,000, of which about 1,000 are considered classic.

The most glorious period of Lutheran hymnody was the period immediately following the Reformation, the sixteenth century. Luther, of course, stood at the head of the hymnists. He is often called the Ambrose of German Hymnody. He set the model for the hymn of the newly-found faith: Objective treatment of the great deeds of a merciful God; a bold, confident joyous church tune; simple, clear, racy, terse language. The Lutheran Hymnal contains the best of the master's hymns for occasions throughout the Church Year. It would require a book to treat the 37 hymns of Luther alone. Luther stimulated such a host of hymn writers to activity that the two centuries following the Reformation are considered the classic period of German hymnody.

Dr. Luther said that he wanted to compose sacred hymns so that the Word of God might dwell among the people by means of song. He succeeded admirably in achieving this aim. Beginning with the famous *Achtliederbuch* of 1524 (one-half of the 8 hymns were by Dr. Luther), the number of hymnals by Lutherans in the next twenty years reached the phenomenal total of more than 100 collections.

The people loved those hymns and sang them regularly. Indeed, the supreme compliment was paid by a member of the Roman Catholic Church at that time. He said that Luther did more damage with his hymns than with his sermons.

Musicians everywhere agree that the Lutheran chorale, that Scriptural, dignified, stately, reverent, devotional, objective, yet fervently-spiritual hymn, introduced by Dr. Luther, is the finest type of music ever composed for public worship. It soars to the skies like a magnificent cathedral. Of these Lutheran chorales the authoritative Graves, *Dictionary of Music*, stated (as quoted by Dr. W. G. Polack in his pamphlet *Church Music*, page 5 : "The chorale originated by Luther cannot be surpassed for dignity and simple devotional earnestness. The chorale melodies of the Lutheran Church have exerted a powerful influence on classical music."

Dr. Polack also quoted Winfred Douglas, *Church Music in History and Practice*: "He (Dr. Luther) practically created the chorale. Like a second Ambrose, he possessed in a pre-eminent degree a gift of writing hymns of the liturgical type. Even his paraphrase of parts of Holy Scripture were so free, so poetically powerful in the idiom of the people, that they are a really new creation. When there is added to this a positive genius for trenchant and forceful melody, supported by adequate musical training, and an almost unparalleled personal force, we are no longer surprised at the tremendous hold that Luther's hymns soon obtained in Germany, or at their influence on the Christian world, which is still increasing."

In his pamphlet *History of the English Hymn* Dr. L. Fuerbringer quoted the famous teacher Karl V. Raumer as follows:

In the hymns of Luther and his co-workers and successors there is real spirituality! Coming from the heart, they touch the heart, they lift it up, they comfort, they indoctrinate, they instruct, so that you feel that you are in the land of experienced truth, in God's church. We become one with many others, who together with us are drawn by one need and one hope to the throne of God. Animated by the same comfort we are all together drawn in a broad stream into another world; we feel what is meant by the words: "I believe in the one holy Christian church and life eternal."

Twenty-two of Dr. Luther's 37 hymns are in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, including his incomparable "A Mighty Fortress is our God, regarded by many as the greatest hymn ever written. They are numbers 80, 85, 95, 103, 104, 137, 195, 224, 231, 249, 251, 259, 260, 261, 262, 267, 287, 313, 329, 387, 458, 500.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the golden age of German hymnody with many outstanding authors. There was, for example, Paul Gerhardt (died 1676), who suffered many tragedies in his life as a faithful Lutheran pastor. Yet, despite all of the troubles, he wrote more than 100 hymns, of which 21 appear in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Among them are such all-time favorites as numbers 58, 77, 142, 172, 192, 554 and others. There was Philip Nicolai (died 1608), who composed both words and music for the "King of Chorales" (number 609) and the "Queen of Chorales" (number 343). There was Johann Heermann (died 1647), who also suffered various tragedies, but who wrote 400 hymns of which 10 appear in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. As a hymnwriter he is regarded second in rank only to Paul Gerhardt. Some of his hymns are sung at least annually in many Lutheran churches (see, for example, numbers 143, 144, 375, 395). There was Martin Rinckart (died 1649) with his widely used number 39; and many others, as any good book on hymnology will quickly reveal.

English hymnody followed a somewhat different course, since the early Protestant reformers generally wanted nothing to do with anything man-made in the church service: no altars, pulpits, paraments, church year, ancient liturgy, or even hymns composed by man or woman. Therefore, up to about A.D. 1700 the only hymns generally used in England and its colonies were metrical versions of the Psalms. Dr. Fuerbringer wrote in his *History of the English Hymn*, "The meter was built up according to the syllabic scheme 8, 6, 8, 6, in nothing but iambics with the second line rhyming with the fourth." The 8, 6, 8, 6 syllable arrangement is called "common meter."

However, beginning about 1700 matters changed greatly in England, chiefly because of the efforts of Isaac Watts (1674-1748), "The Father of English Hymnody." Watts, the pastor of a large Non-conformist church in London, felt that he could write something better than the "wretched paraphrases of the Psalms," and he did. Of his many hymns, often written when he was in poor health, *The Lutheran Hymnal* has 31, more than the hymns of any other author. Many of them are greatly loved and often sung (see, for example, numbers 27, 87, 123, 175, 344, 416, 426, 487, and others).

Then there is Charles Wesley (1707-1788), a prolific writer of some 3500 hymns, of which an even dozen appear in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. In connection with his hymns, one should, however, note well the remarks of Dr. Fuerbringer in the pamphlet previously cited: "Wesley is thoroughly subjective in his hymns. The objective character, which made the Lutheran hymn the great, strong congregational hymn that it is, is totally absent in Wesley's hymns. His concept of the hymn is that it must be the expression of a person's own,

subjective feelings and experiences." That is clearly evident, for example, in the familiar "Jesus, Lover of my Soul" and in others.

After Watts and Wesley there were a number of other notable English hymn writers, like Augustus Toplady (1740-1778), who wrote the most famous English hymn, "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me" (number 376). John Newton (1725-1807) is represented by 8 hymns in *The Lutheran Hymnal*; William Cooper (1731-1800) by 3; Ann Steele (1716-1778) by 5; Reginald Heber (1783-1826) also by 5.

*The Lutheran Hymnal*, of course, has hymns composed by authors from various other countries, but we have mentioned particularly the German and the British, since the hymns from these two languages are most widely used. Many of them are some of the most exalted poems ever written, eminently suitable for our worship of God. In *The Lutheran Hymnal* there are slightly less than 250 hymns by German authors, slightly more than 250 by British. Between them they compose almost five-sixths of the hymns in this collection.

We must not forget either to mention Catherine Winkworth (1829-1878), eminent, able, and beloved translator of more than 70 German hymns in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Dr. Polack in his *The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal* wrote of her: "Catherine Winkworth is the foremost in rank and popularity of modern translators from German into English. Her translations are the most widely used of any from that language. They have had more to do with the modern revival of the English use of German hymns than the versions of any other writer."

f. *The Lutheran Hymnal* is an outstanding collection of hymns for use in worship.

Both the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod had compiled several hymnals before *The Lutheran Hymnal* was published in 1941. The WELS published its first *English Church Hymnal* with 115 hymns in 1910 in a word edition. In 1920 it published a considerably enlarged *Book of Hymns* with 320 hymns in both a word and a tune-edition. In 1929 the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod resolved to prepare a new hymnal and to ask the sister synods in the Synodical Conference to join in that enterprise. The other synods agreed; an inter-synod committee was appointed; it worked for approximately 10 years; and finally, *The Lutheran Hymnal* was ready for use in 1940 and 1941. The introductory price was an amazing 81 cents a copy (with 2 percent discount for payment within 15 days), or more than 10 pages for one cent. It proved to be one of the most popular hymnals ever published.

*The Lutheran Hymnal* is a good service book, surely one of the best that has been compiled up to this time. It is thoroughly Scriptural, as it must be, if it is to be used in our congregations, for false doctrine is like the rotten apple that finally affects the entire bushel. To achieve that end the committee either rejected those hymns that contained false doctrine, or it altered them to conform with Scripture. (Every one of its hymns is based on some Scripture text, as indicated above the music on the left side. The author, date, and translator, if any, when known, are also given at that place. The name of the tune in the original language, the composer, the date, and the collection in which it first appeared, if known, form the notations above the music on the right side. The numbers in the center refer to the number of syllables in each line.)

*The Lutheran Hymnal* correctly presents every doctrine of Scripture; law and gospel, creation and justification, sanctification and preservation, the doctrine of the Trinity and of the person of Christ, confession and absolution, the way of salvation and the spreading of that way, prayer and praise, faith and trust, prophecy and fulfillment, cross and comfort, angels and man, death and resurrection, this world and the world to come. All of these and undoubtedly others are so clearly presented in this hymnal that, even if by some calamity the Bible were taken from us, we should still have every one of its doctrines presented to us in this hymnal.

*The Lutheran Hymnal* has poetic beauty; it uses the language of the heart; its hymns are dignified and stately, eminently suitable for worship. It studiously avoids the so-called Gospel hymns of the foot-stamping type which often contain very little Gospel. If a hymn or a song goes to our feet, it frequently does not go to our head or heart.

*The Lutheran Hymnal* is ecumenical, that is, it contains hymns from many different church denominations. Professor L. Blankenbuehler pointed out in his pamphlet previously cited, page 45, that the term

Lutheran in the title does not mean that all the hymns were composed by Lutheran writers. "We would be depriving ourselves of some of the masterpieces of hymnody, were we to omit some of the classic gems from other than Lutheran sources" (page 46). "The term Lutheran can and does mean: intended for use in Lutheran congregations. In this sense the title is highly and appropriately applicable...the term Lutheran in our circles, whenever the matter of doctrine is concerned, is equivalent to Christian...in this sense our new *Lutheran Hymnal* is a church hymnal.

Professor Blankenbuehler also wrote (p. 44):

Since the founding of the Christian Church practically every country which has accepted the Gospel has contributed to the sum total of Christian hymns. Practically every religious movement within the limits of Christendom (and also some from those without) has added songs of praise to the body of Christian hymnody. Christian hymns have originated among all sorts and conditions of men; they have come from various races and nationalities, from different denominations, from the most varied professions and occupations, from Christian singers grown gray in the service of their Lord, from such as have turned to the truth late in life, from theologians, from musicians, from Miriams and Deborahs and Marys, even from children. Christian hymns have been composed in all great periods in the history of the Christian Church, during the enthusiasms of reforming eras and great missionary endeavors, and also during the ebb-tides of Gospel proclamation. Thus the term ecumenical in the sense of general, world-wide in origin, in extent and influence, can properly be applied to the Christian hymn. And this ecumenical character is one of the great glories of the Christian hymn. For even as the Church of Jesus Christ knows no race, no color, no nationality, no language, no male or female, no social status, no class, no age, but draws its adherence from all the children of men, from all walks of life, so the Christian hymn is also truly universal, truly catholic, truly cosmopolitan, truly Pentecostal in the original sense of the term.

An article from Christianity Today, 4/13/73, emphasizes the diverse origins of some of our favorite Christmas carols:

The carols we sing at Christmas, for example, include the Roman Catholic "Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful," the Unitarian, "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear," the Episcopal "Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem," the Lutheran "All My Heart This Night Rejoices," the Moravian "Angels From the Realms of Glory," and the Congregational "Joy to the World."...We sing the Wesleyan "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," the Baptist "Blest Be the Tie that Binds," and the Plymouth Brethren, "Oh Lamb of God, Still Keep me."

Whatever the origin of a hymn, whatever the occupation of the writer (in addition to pastors, theological professors, college presidents, superintendents, bishops, monks, priests, Dr. Blankenbuehler lists laymen of 28 professions who composed hymns that are included in *The Lutheran Hymnal*).\*

This hymnal is a precious treasure. Since it was compiled in the 1930's, it is, of course, dated in a few instances; it uses King James English; some of its melodies are difficult to sing; it could stand some revision. Yet, when this is said, it still remains an outstanding collection of hymns. Be sure to prize it highly; use it regularly at home, school, and church; and learn it well. You will surely be richly blessed thereby.

6. Daily family devotions are an excellent way to hear and to study God's Word.

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\* We thank the Lord for the composers of the hymns in our hymnal.

With Psalm 119:14-16 we confess: "I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I will delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word." If we believe it, we shall make provisions to read and to meditate upon God's Word daily either privately or with the family or both. That would be following the fine example of the Bereans who "examined the Scriptures every day" (Acts 17:11).

The Lord Jesus said, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me" (John 5:39). If we live according to this example, then we shall surely read some part of God's Word diligently and daily.

In his explanation to the Third Commandment, Dr. Luther wrote: "Actually there should be worship daily" (*Large Catechism*, 85). Believing and accepting this confession, as we do, since it correctly expresses Scriptural doctrine, we shall again be reminded that daily devotions are surely advisable, recommended, even necessary, for the Christian household. What form they will take is a matter of Christian freedom. It might mean reading in a devotional booklet; it could well be the reading and discussion of a part of the Scripture, followed by a corporate or an *ex corde* prayer.

In our daily devotions we also want to recall what Dr. Luther wrote as the heading of every chief part of the Catechism: "As the head of the family should teach it in the simplest way to those in his household." Every day one might profitably recite one or more parts of the Catechism, thus following the example of the Great Reformer.

Such daily family devotions are an excellent way to "grow in grace" (II Peter 3:18). In a relaxed atmosphere they provide opportunity for learning, for inquiring, and for worshipping, which is exactly what the Third Commandment asks of us.

7. The Bible Class is also an excellent way to hear and to study God's Word.

In years gone by Sunday School, unfortunately, was looked upon as a learning experience chiefly for children from nursery school through the eighth grade. It almost seemed as if the eighth grade and confirmation marked the close of regular instructions in the Word. Indeed, on his Confirmation Day a young lad once handed his Catechism to the pastor with the remark, "You can have it; I won't need it anymore."

Fortunately, this attitude has changed. In our day many or most of our congregations provide for an adult Bible class either on Sunday mornings in connection with Sunday School or sometime during the week or at both times.

Those Bible classes, together with Christian schools of all types, provide excellent opportunities for spiritual growth, something that our Lord commands in the Third Commandment. Oh, that all of our adults would use these periods for Christian growth, for the strengthening of their faith, for answering questions, for receiving the ability to give an answer to those who ask about our faith (I Peter 3:15), and in general for doing what God asks of us in His Third Commandment!

8. Personal and congregational evangelism is the way to share the Word with the unchurched.

Our God tells us to share His Word with the heathen in so many Bible passages that one could well write a book on this phase of the Church's work. That is exactly what has been done by various authors. The reader is referred to those works for exhaustive treatments of this subject. Here we simply ask you to read such Bible passages as Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Acts 1:8; Psalm 96; etc.

C. God commands us to learn His Word gladly.

We have spent quite some time on Dr. Luther's "gladly hear" the Word, as he wrote in his *Small Catechism*, showing that this is indeed what Scripture says and pointing to the blessings that will surely result, if



the Word is properly heard. Now we shall add a few brief words that apply specifically to the "gladly learn" the Word of God.

Our Lord said (Luke 11:28), "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Now the Greek word for "obey" means first of all to "guard or preserve it, keep it safe so that no one robs us of it." That is what Dr. Luther wrote; he used the word "bewahren," meaning to preserve.

If we are ever to preserve the Word among us, then surely we must learn it and keep it in our hearts, even as Mary, Jesus' mother "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

The prophet Jeremiah symbolically wrote about loving and learning the Word with, "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jeremiah 15:16). The prophet Ezekiel (3:3) wrote in a similar vein.

Our old sinful nature, of course, complains bitterly at having to learn God's Word, especially when we are young. Yet, there are few better things that we can do at home and in our Christian educational agencies than to learn many Bible passages or even chapters of God's Word. Many Moslem children learn all of the Koran. Shall we have a lesser regard for the Word that comes to us from the true God? One of the eminent Lutheran theologians in America was said to have known the entire Epistle to the Romans in five languages (Greek, Latin, French, German, English). Should we be less zealous about learning portions like some Psalms, the Beatitudes, great passages of the Epistles, Revelation 21 and many other individual Bible passages? Doing that will surely bring us blessings beyond compare for every situation in life.

#### D. God commands us to believe and to do what the Word says.

We have frequently touched upon this thought in the preceding parts of this essay. Here we only wish to recall some words of our Lord: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24). "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50), "What was sown on good soil (this is the Parable of the Sower and the Seed) is the man who hears the Word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding 100, 60 or 30 times what was sown" (Matthew 13:23). "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows" (Luke 12:47—Here Jesus was speaking about Judgment Day and how those who knew God's will and did not do it will suffer greater punishment than those who never knew it).

In the fact of these clear words of our Lord, it seems incredible that many people within the visible church refuse to believe and to live according to parts of God's Word. The Lord gives us the power to believe all of it and to live it.

#### IV. What is the Role of our Lord in Keeping the Third Commandment?

When we look at ourselves and the untold number of times that we have sinned against the Third Commandment, we must surely despair of attaining that righteousness which God demands. Humanly speaking, there is then nothing left for us except everlasting separation from God and eternal curse in hell.

Yet, it is for this reason that our Heavenly Father sent His only begotten Son into this world, "laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6 K.J.), and healed us with his stripes (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus is indeed the Lamb of God, who has taken away the sin of all the world (John 1:29), including our transgressions of the Third Commandment. Now believe it, and you have His forgiveness for all your sins (John 3:16).

Furthermore, our Lord gave us the perfect example for keeping the Third Commandment, an example that we are to strive to follow at all times. When He was 12, He stayed in Jerusalem's Temple three days, "sitting among the teachers (of God's Word), listening to them and asking questions" (Luke 2:46). After He began His public ministry, He went into the synagogue regularly to teach and to preach. (St. Matthew tells us about that on at least four different occasions, Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; see also Luke 4.) He is our example.