

# Understanding Worship at St. Michael

Welcome to St. Michael Lutheran Church. Worship at every congregation is a little different, hopefully this will help explain some of the worship practices at St. Michael. If you have any questions, call Pastor John at 540.951.8951.

## The liturgy is the beginning point

Lutherans call their pattern of worship “the liturgy.” At the heart of our liturgy is God. Liturgy comes from the Greek and means “the work of the people.” The work of liturgy is the participation in the responses, prayers and singing of the hymns as well as listening to the Word which is done to worship and honor God. The focus is not on the performance of the pastor, choir nor others participating in the service but focuses on God’s word and grace. **The entire liturgy is based on the word of God from scripture.**

## Standing, sitting and kneeling

You will have a difficult time sleeping during a Lutheran worship service because you are always standing up, then sitting, then standing up and then kneeling and then... We have a reason for each.

- We **stand** to express joy such as when we sing hymns and to express our beliefs as we say together the creed.
- We **sit** to listen.
- We **kneel** in prayer to show thankfulness as we receive Holy Communion.

## What are the two books in the pew?

We use the red ***Evangelical Lutheran Worship (LBW)*** as our basic worship book. The ***ELW*** is composed of services and supporting material in the front and hymns in the back. It is part service book and part hymnal. If you see a page number in the bulletin, know that is at the bottom of the page and found in the front of the book. If you see a hymn number, it is at the top of the page and located in toward the back of the book.

We also have a copy of the ***Bible*** in each pew. The page numbers for the Scripture readings will be printed in the bulletin so you can follow along when passages are read.

## Lutherans are a singing church

The Psalmist said to “make a joyful noise unto the Lord” and we Lutherans believe it. Music composes about 40% of our worship service. Notice that the Psalmist said to “make a joyful noise” and did not say “make perfect sounds to the Lord.” That means that we have fun singing, even if we do not hit all the right notes. Both the organ and the piano are used to accompany and support hymns and special music.

## **Robes and more Robes**

In Lutheran churches, the pastor and others who participate in the service typically wear robes. By wearing the robes, the participants emphasize the action of the participant rather than emphasizing the person. Worship is not a contest to see who can dress the best but is about worshipping and honoring God.

## **A unique design**

Lutheran churches have an altar in the center of the elevated area of the church which is called the chancel. This is the area where we meet God. Having the altar in the center reminds us that the point of worship is to praise, honor and be with God. Above the altar is a cross as a reminder of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Candles on each side of the cross remind us that Christ is the light of the world and we are to be lights in the world, also. The flowers on each side of the altar are a reminder of the resurrection as they come to life after being buried in the ground. The lectern is the smaller speaker's stand and is for the reading all the lessons. The pulpit is the larger stand and it is used for the sermon. The baptismal font along with the paschal candle are at the base of the steps leading up to the altar. The baptismal font holds the water for baptism. The paschal candle is used at baptisms, funerals, and during the Easter Season to remind us that Christ rose from the dead.

## **The church has a calendar**

Just like the calendar from January to December that everyone uses, the church has a church year calendar.

The church year calendar is divided into two parts. The first part is about the life of Christ and the second is about the teachings of Christ and the church. The church year begins with Advent at the end of November or the first of December. Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of Christ and lasts for four Sundays. Christmas follows as the church celebrates the birth of Christ. The Christmas season lasts for 12 days (remember the song, *The 12 Days of Christmas*). The next season is Epiphany which features scripture that reveals the signs that Jesus is the Messiah such as the coming of the Wise Men. Lent, a time of 40 days, not counting Sundays begins on Ash Wednesday. The Lenten season is a journey of preparing for the death of Christ on Good Friday. The Easter season follows as a celebration of the resurrection of our Lord and continues until Pentecost, the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The second part is composed of the Sundays after Pentecost and lasts approximately six months. During these Sundays, the scripture readings focus on the teachings of Jesus and stories about the early church.

The church celebrates other festivals in the course of the year when they fall on a Sunday.

## **Each Season has a unique color**

Each season of the church year has a color

- Blue is the color of the sky, a color of hope, and is used during Advent.
- White is the color of purity and is used during Christmas, during Easter and on a Saint's day when the saint died a natural death.
- Purple is the color of mourning and is used during Lent.

- Green is the color of growth and is used during Epiphany and the Sundays after Pentecost.
- Red is the color of fire so it is used on Pentecost and Reformation Sunday as a sign of the coming of the Holy Spirit and is also used on the days we remember people who were martyred for the Gospel.

## **Look for the symbols**

On the altar, pulpit and lectern are cloths which are called paraments. They are changed to reflect the color of the season. They also have symbols which tell a story. If you see something that looks like an XP, that means Christ as X is *ch* is Greek and P is an *r* in Greek so you have the first three letters of Christ. Dozens of other symbols are used which each tell a story.

## **What are sacraments?**

Lutherans believe that a sacrament is God's visible word which combines an action instituted by God with an earthly element or elements. Using this definition, Lutherans believe that we have two sacraments—Baptism and Holy Communion. God comes to us in a very personal way in the sacraments, combining God's name and ours in baptism in the cleansing water and feeding us with Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

## **Holy Communion is known by many names**

The meal and the celebration of the Lord offering us his body and blood has several names.

- Holy Communion – The name is derived from I Corinthians 10:16-17. We believe that in this sacrament that we are united with Christ and all Christians through the sharing of Jesus' body and blood.
- The Breaking of Bread - This descriptions is from Acts 2:42 and is the oldest name for the sacrament.
- The Eucharist – This word is from the Greek and means thanksgiving. The gospels record Jesus as giving thanks at the last supper.
- The Lord's Supper – Using these words, we acknowledge that the meal is not of human origin but has been instituted and given as a gift by God.
- The Last Supper – Scripture records this meal as the last supper that Jesus shares with the disciples.
- Sacrament of the Altar – This name describes the location where the meal is celebrated. The altar is the focus of worship.

## **You use real wine?**

Yes, we use real wine because that is what Jesus would have used. At the time of Jesus, the area had very few wells so most of the water was not fit to drink. Grapes were abundant so the Hebrews discovered that the grapes would purify the water as the fermentation process took place. All the people, including the young children drank wine. It was much like people in the south drinking ice tea.

But, we offer a choice for people at communion. We offer the choice of grape juice for those who cannot drink wine. Just ask the person giving out the wine for grape juice.