

Using All God's Gifts in Worship

Steven Lange
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From the beginning, God involved all the senses of his people in worship.

- Before the Fall
 - The beautiful surroundings of the Garden of Eden
 - The two trees in the middle of the Garden
- After the Fall into sin
 - Animal sacrifices
 - The rainbow
 - The object lessons God used with Abraham (stars, sand on the seashore)
 - Various altars and pillars erected by God's people as reminders of God's promises.

The Mosaic System of Worship

- The epitome of using all God's gifts in worship.
- The worship space
 - The Tabernacle (Exodus 35-40)
 - The Temple (1 Kings 5-8)
- The worship furnishings (Exodus 37-38; 1 Kings 7)
- The worship art (e.g., the intricate embroidery on the curtains in the Tabernacle and the exquisite carvings in the Temple)
- The priests' vestments (Exodus 39)

The Mosaic System of Worship

- The rituals of worship
 - Animal sacrifices (Leviticus 1-7)
 - The worship calendar (Leviticus 23)
 - The effect of ceremonial cleanness on the worshiper's daily life (Leviticus 11 ff.)
- The music of worship (Psalms; 1 Chronicles 6)
- God involved every sense and every area of art in the worship life of his people.
- His purpose: To keep his people entirely focused on the Messiah whom he had promised to send.

New Testament Worship Flowed from Old Testament Worship

- New Testament worship forms continued this absolute focus on Christ, only with a different perspective.
 - Old Testament worship looked ahead to the Savior who was to come.
 - New Testament worship looked at the Savior who came just as God had promised he would.
- This focus on Christ was unmistakable in the worship life of the New Testament Church
 - The form of the weekly worship service flowed from the synagogue service and maintained a focus on Christ and his Word.
 - The church over time developed a New Testament church calendar that provided a yearly review of Christ's work as our Savior.

New Testament Christians Continued to Use the Arts in Worship

- Architecture
- Church furnishings
- Vestments
- Visual art
- Music
- All the worshiper's senses are involved in worship.

Luther's Appreciation for the Arts in Worship

- “I most heartily desire that music, that divine and precious gift, be praised and extolled before all people... Experience proves that, next to the Word of God, only music deserves being extolled as the mistress and governess of the feelings of the human heart.” (Luther's Works, St. Louis Edition, Vol. 14, p. 428)

Luther's Appreciation for the Arts in Worship

- “Nor am I of the opinion that the gospel should destroy and blight all the arts, as some of the super-religious claim. But I would like to see all the arts, especially music, be used in service of him who gave and made it.” (Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 53, p. 316)

Luther's Appreciation of the Arts in Worship

- Luther himself was a musician, the composer and author of many hymns.
- Consulted with musicians he considered more gifted than himself as he put together his German Service.
- Highly valued the contributions of other musicians and artists.
- Refused to give in to those who contended that all art and music ought to be removed from worship.

The Four Principles of Lutheran Worship

- Let the Gospel predominate.
- Let the people participate.
- Let the historic voice of the church be heard.
- *Let all of God's gifts be used in worship.*

Challenges to Luther's Worship Principles

- The challenge of Calvinism
 - Focus on God's law and sovereignty rather than on the gospel
 - Disavowal of almost all art and music
- The challenge of Pietism
 - Devaluation of God's Word and Sacraments
 - Emphasis on the personal, emotional experience
- Fear of anything "Roman Catholic"
 - Neither Calvinism nor Pietism had much use for the liturgical worship used in the Roman Catholic Church.
 - Desire to avoid the errors of the Roman Catholic Church also contributed to an avoidance of their forms of worship.

Lutheran Worship Principles Still Stand because They Stand on God's Word.

- Since the Gospel is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16), Christ’s Gospel in Word and Sacraments still must predominate in our worship.
- Since God’s people still are “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) who are to “offer [their] bodies as living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1), God’s people still need to participate in the Divine Service—first as receivers of God’s gifts, but also as responders to God’s gifts.

Lutheran Worship Principles Still Stand because They Stand on God's Word.

- Since there still is “one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6), we still need to recognize that we are united with the saints who have preceded us and confess that unity in our worship.
- Since the musical and visual arts still are tremendous gifts from God that communicate powerfully to people, we will continue to use these gifts from God to powerfully proclaim Christ in every aspect of our worship.

Involving All Our Senses in Worship

- Hearing
 - The spoken Word of God (Scripture Lessons, sermon, etc.)
 - The sung Word of God
 - The “instrumental” Word of God
 - All focusing our attention on Christ and the saving message of his Gospel.
- Taste
 - The Lord’s Supper
 - Again, focusing our attention intensely on Christ and his Gospel.

Involving All Our Senses in Worship

- Sight
 - Visual art
 - The “actions” of worship
- Touch
 - Water in the baptismal font
 - The bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper
 - Textures in the architecture and artwork
- Smell
 - Candles
 - Incense

The Purpose: To Focus Our Attention Intensely on Christ and His Gospel

- Every aspect of our worship life, whether it involves our hearing, taste, sight, touch, or smell, must serve to focus our attention on Christ and his Gospel. That is why we gather in the Divine Service: so that Christ might be present among us in his Word and Sacraments and serve us with his Gospel.
- As we consider using God's various gifts in worship, we will want to make sure that whatever we do aids in focusing the attention of the worshiper on Christ.

What about God's Technological Gifts?

- Can the use of technology such as video screens and PowerPoint presentations detract from the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel? Sure they can.
- Can they also serve to focus the worshiper's attention more intensely on Christ and his Gospel? Of course they can.
- When using God's technological gifts in worship, we will consider the same question we consider when using God's non-technological gifts in worship: Will our use of this gift of God serve the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel or detract from it?

What about God's Technological Gifts?

- Different congregations may answer this question differently.
 - Different congregations are made up of different people.
 - They are located in different areas with different demographics.
 - What works in one congregation will not always work in another congregation.
- Where the use of God's gifts in worship supports the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel, God's people are blessed.
- For more thoughts on the use of video screens in worship, see the appended articles from the latest *Worship the Lord* newsletter.

Examples from Hope Lutheran Church, Louisville, Kentucky

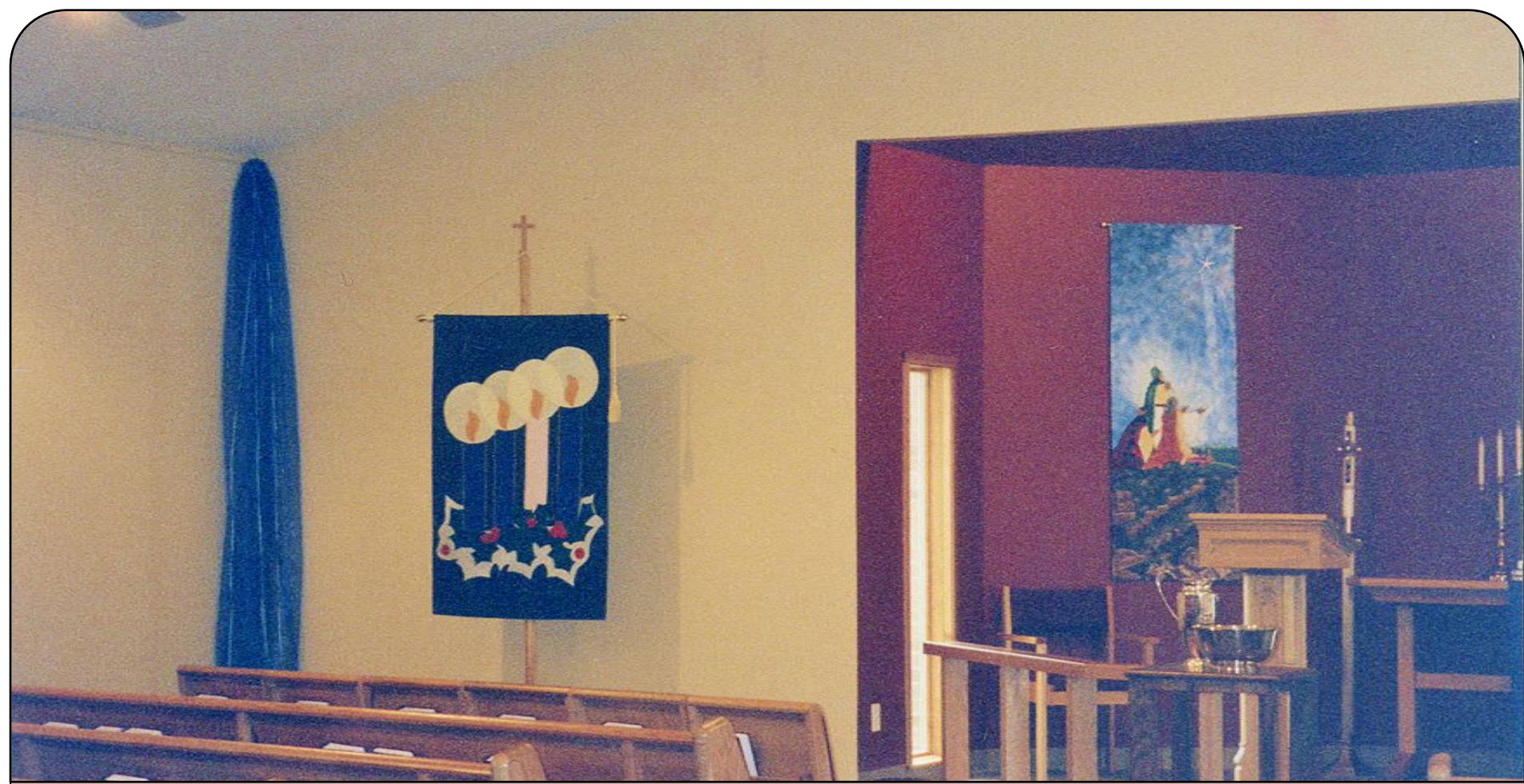
- God has richly blessed the congregation I serve in so many ways.
 - An Altar Guild chairwoman who “gets it” and loves it.
 - Gifted artists in several different media.
 - Creative minds that are eager to help others focus intensely on Christ and his Gospel.
 - Members who have grown to appreciate the extensive use of art that we use in our worship life.

Examples from Hope Lutheran Church, Louisville, Kentucky

- God has richly blessed your congregations, too, in many different ways.
- The gifts God has given your congregation are not necessarily the same as the gifts God has given my congregation.
- Not everything that we do at Hope will necessarily work at your congregation.
- My purpose in giving you examples from our congregation's worship life is not to say, "You should do this."
- Rather, I pray that God will use some of the blessings he has given us as a starting point for your own use of God's gifts in the worship life of your congregation.

Baptism

- Our baptismal font stands at the foot of the center aisle in front of the chancel.
- We keep distilled water in the baptismal font at all times.
- When speaking the Invocation at the beginning of the service, I pour water into the font from a silver pitcher we keep near the font for that purpose.
- Our purpose in doing this: To focus the worshiper's attention on Christ's gift of baptism and to demonstrate the ongoing value of baptism in our daily lives.



Advent

Hangings in corners

Colored poinsettias on altar



Christmas Eve



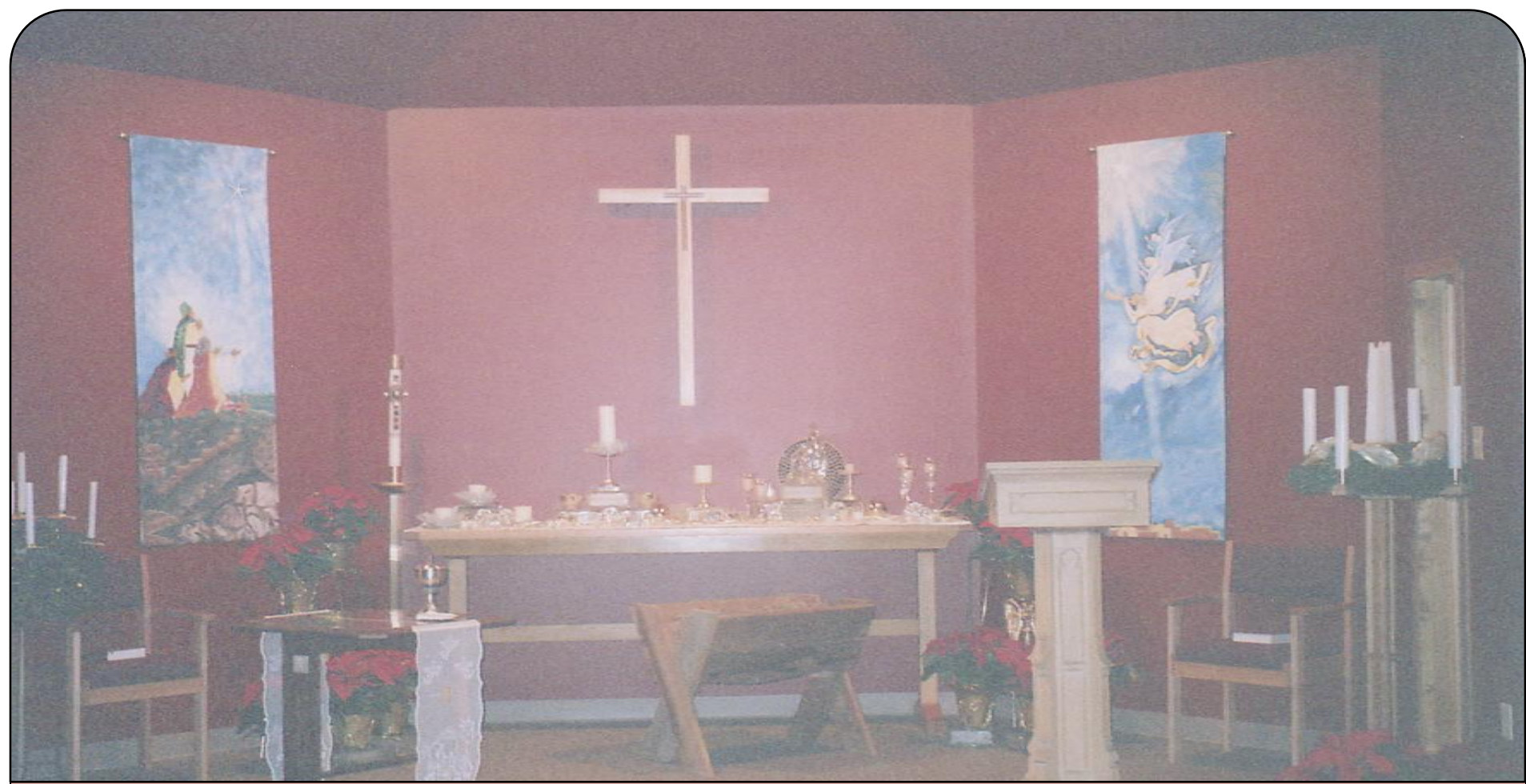
Christmas Eve



Christmas Eve



Christmas Day



Christmas Day



The Baptism of Our Lord

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

- “Alleluia” banners made by Sunday school children.
- During the singing of the “Farewell to Alleluia,” Sunday school children bring banners up to basket in front of sanctuary.
- After all banners are in the basket, the basket is closed.
- A child then carries the basket out of the sanctuary.
- The basket remains visible until Easter, when it is opened and all the “Alleluia” banners are displayed again.



Lent

Holy Week

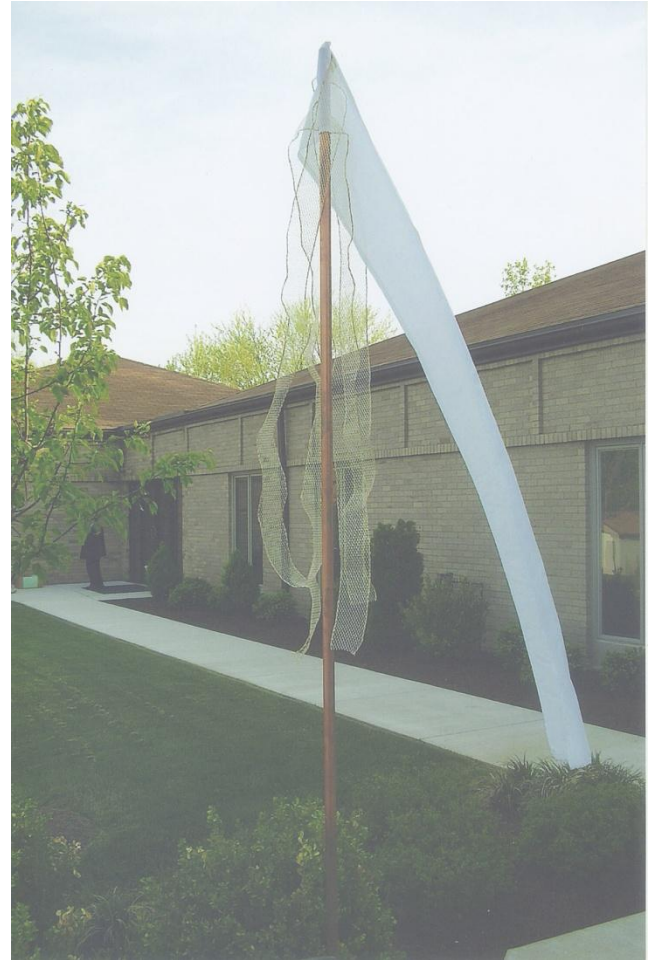
- Maundy Thursday:
Stripping of the Altar
- Good Friday
 - Sanctuary is uncharacteristically bare.
 - Large, simple “wooden” cross
 - Darkness—even the windows are covered with black shades until the Easter Vigil





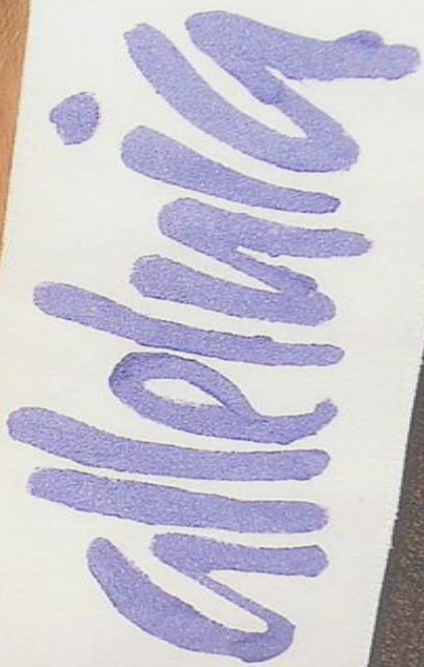
Easter

Easter





Easter

A small white banner with the word "Alpha" written in blue cursive script, hanging from a wooden surface. The banner is rectangular and has a slightly frayed edge. It is suspended by a thin string or cord from a wooden ledge or shelf. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a wall or a large piece of fabric. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the banner and the wood.

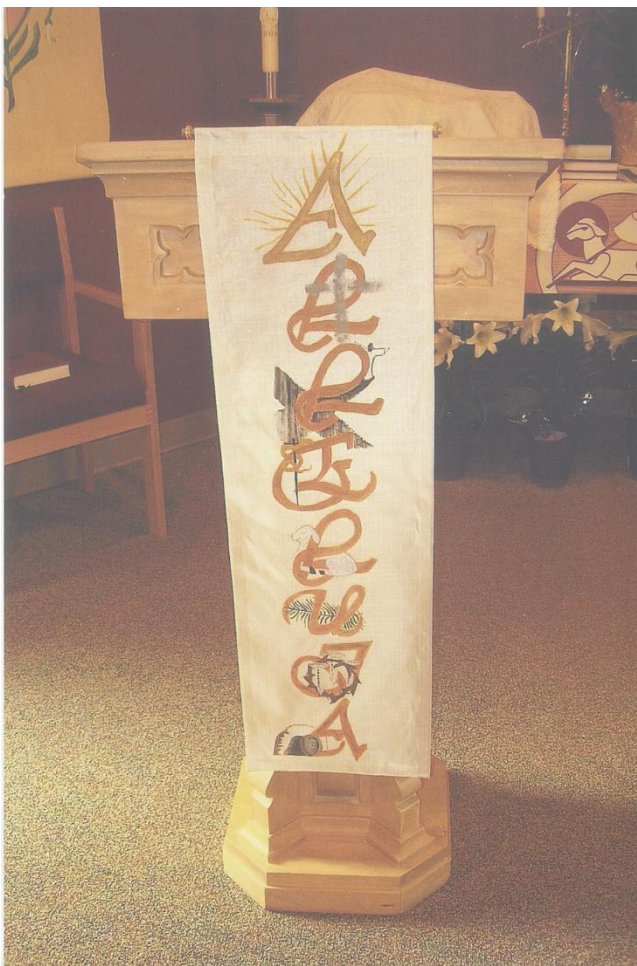
Alpha

Easter

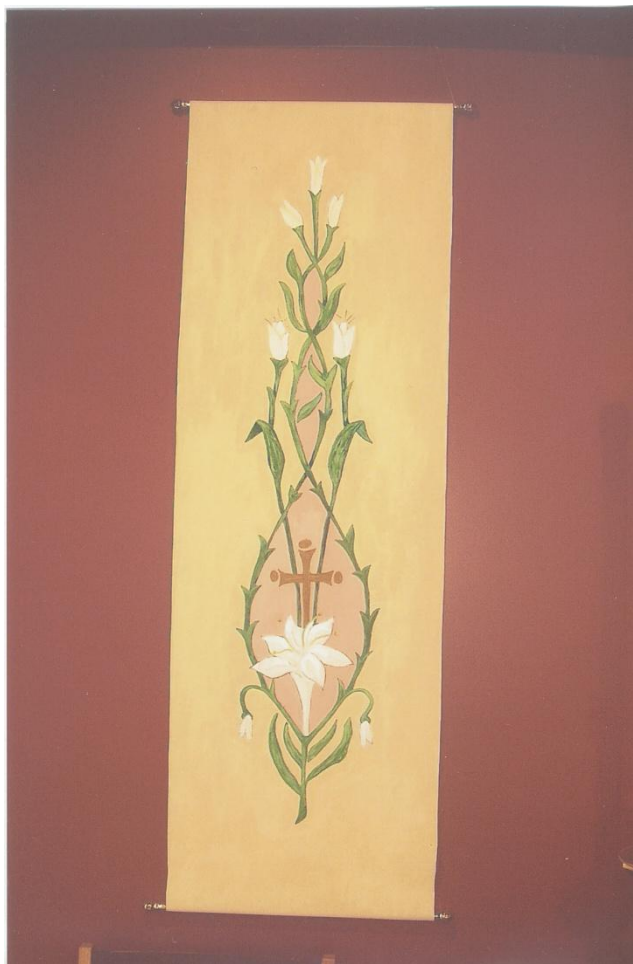


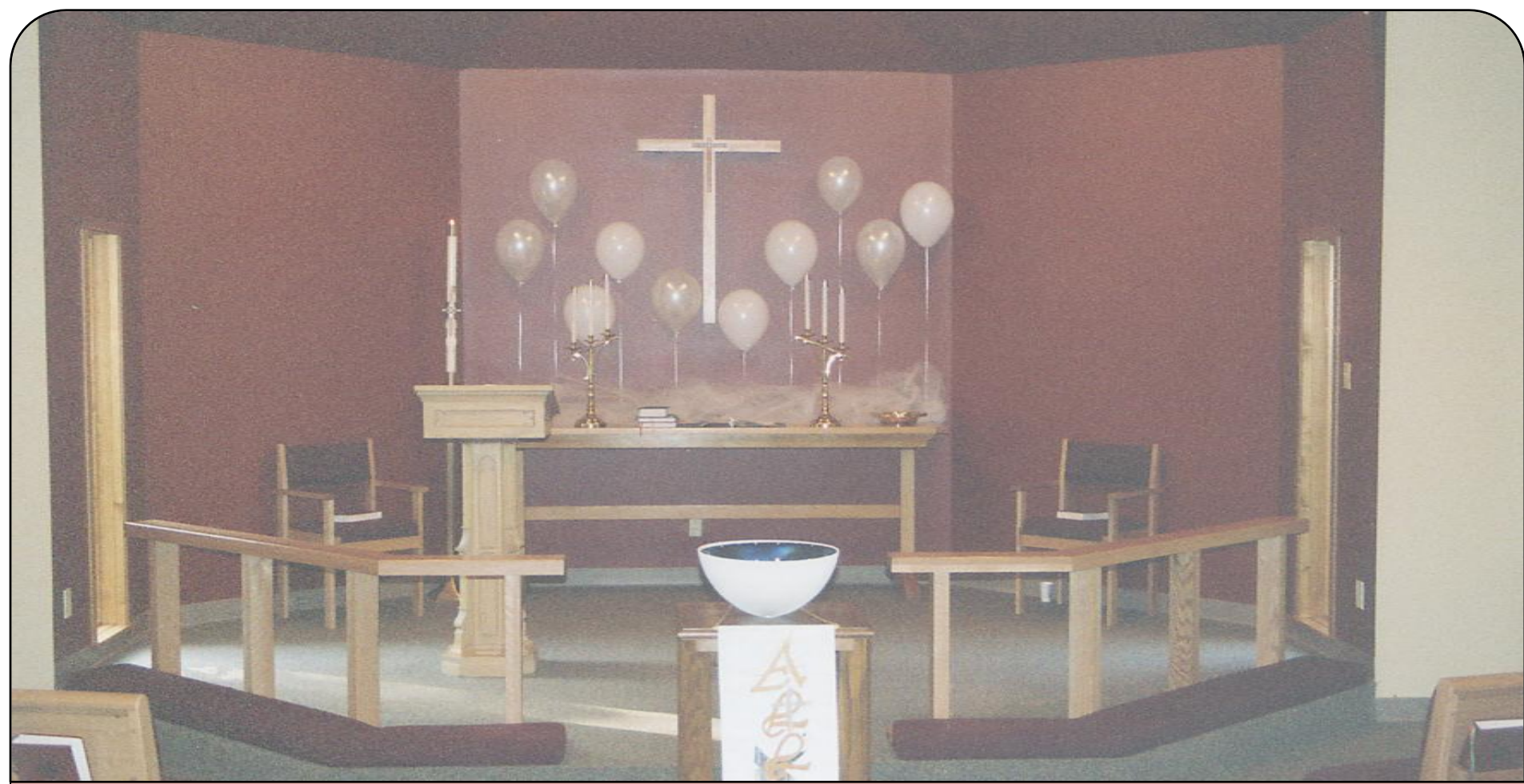
Easter

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Easter





Ascension



Ascension



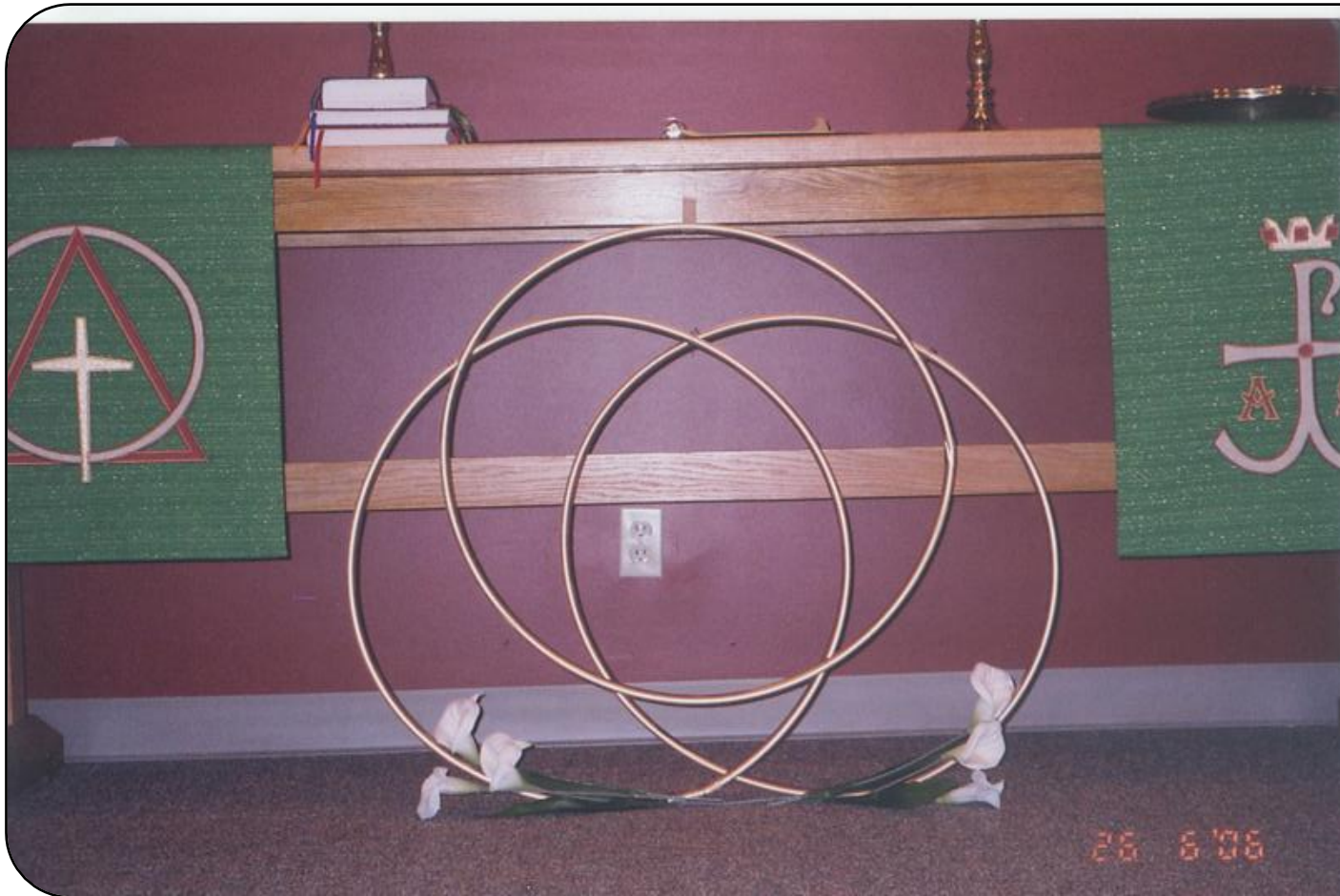
Ascension



Day of Pentecost



Day of Pentecost



Holy Trinity

Other Uses of Art in Worship

- Fish nets focusing the worshiper's attention on the Gospel account in which Jesus called his disciples to be "fishers of men."
- Ten ceramic lamps, hand-made by a member, used during End Time. Five are lit, five not, to call to the worshiper's mind Jesus' parable of the Ten Virgins.
- Various original paintings on canvas used in the chancel and throughout the sanctuary.
- Everything has the express purpose of focusing the worshiper's attention more intensely on Christ and his Gospel.

Psalm 150

Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,
praise him with tambourine and dancing,
praise him with the strings and flute,
praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

PRAISE THE LORD!