

Worship the Lord

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness -Psalm 29:2

Opening worship

Begin your study of God’s word by reading together **Psalm 96**. The psalm reflects the joy of God’s people at his glory and majesty, his victory over sin, and his return to judge the earth.

Opening prayer

The leader will offer a prayer to the Lord, asking that our worship may be pleasing and acceptable in his sight, for Jesus’ sake.

Introduction

In Lesson One we considered the object of our worship—the Lord God—and worship which is fitting and proper according to the pattern which God himself has prescribed. Lesson Two approached worship from the standpoint of how our theology shapes our practice and motivates our worship decisions.

Today’s lesson considers practical implications, as we see how the Christian church has implemented these guidelines for Christian worship through the centuries.

The Divine Service: A believer’s encounter with God

There may be different styles of worship and many different cultural contexts, but the essential nature of corporate Christian worship is always the same. Dr. David Adams writes, “Worship is a divine dialogue in which God speaks to us and gives his gifts through the word and the sacraments. We, the people of God, gather in his presence at his beckoning to receive those gifts in faith and respond in praise and thanksgiving. The response of the people of God in worship is to be normed by God through the gifts of God.”

Read Acts 2:42. What is central to our encounter with God? See also 2 Timothy 4:2; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 11:17-32.

Read Jeremiah 23:24-29. We encounter God in _____ and _____, and nowhere else. (We call these the _____.) We do not meet God today in dreams, visions, tongues, miracles, our own emotions, in visceral feelings, or in perceived prayer responses. For this reason, the entire worship experience through which we encounter God centers in _____ and _____. Where this is missing, there is no genuine encounter with God, no matter how people may feel about their “worship experience.”

Throughout the history of the Christian church, believers have maintained the centrality of word and sacrament. The very earliest liturgies we have available (see attached*) reflect the centrality of the means of grace. Each element of a Christian worship service forms part of this sacred dialog between Christ, the Bridegroom, and his bride, the Church.

Consider each of the following elements of a liturgical service and explain how it fits into the experience of encountering God in word and sacrament:

Part of the service	Who is speaking or giving to whom?	What purpose does this part of the liturgy serve? How does it reinforce the centrality of word and sacrament?
Opening hymn		
Invocation		
Confession†		

* The sample selection is from the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (Roberts, Alexander. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7), a compilation of liturgical and practical writings from the early Christian church. The selection dates from about 300 AD, but the texts were in use in the church well before that, going back to the first century. Notice the *Anaphora* (copy, p. 486, column ii, second half of the column), which forms part of the preface to the sacrament and is still in use today. Our present liturgical form ties our worship to that of faithful Christians through the centuries, going back all the way to the apostles! Notice also the practice of excluding non-members prior to celebration of the sacrament.

† The confession and absolution, as we use them today in the service, are relatively new additions to the liturgical service. Can you explain why they were not included in the worship service much prior to the 1700s?

Absolution		
<i>Glory be to the Father</i> (Or other song of praise)		
Lessons		
Creed		
Sermon		
<i>Create in Me</i> (Or other supplicatory or praise hymn.)		
Offering		
Sacrament of the Altar		
<i>Song of Simeon</i> (Or other song of thanksgiving.)		
Benediction		

Think of other elements of the worship service that are used from time to time. What purpose do they serve?

Optional service part	Who is speaking or giving to whom?	What purpose does this part of the liturgy serve? How does it reinforce the centrality of word and sacrament?

Read John 1:14. This verse describes the greatest event in the history of the world: the incarnation of God. This reality is celebrated in Christian worship, as we meet the living word and encounter his bodily presence. Christian worship centers upon the reality of Christ for us as our atoning sacrifice, and Christ among us, as he is present in word and sacrament with his people.