



Worship the Lord

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Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors

This edition of *Worship the Lord* highlights the two gathering rites of *Christian Worship Supplement*: “Gathering Rite on Holy Baptism,” and “Gathering Rite on the Word of God.” Pastor Jonathan Micheel, one of the contributing authors for the supplement, serves Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Christian Worship Supplement: Gathering Rites

By Jonathan Micheel

Our culture exalts the individual. We emphasize individual rights. Stores market according to our individual preferences. We have the opportunity to personalize many things, from our web browser’s home page to our mp3 player’s playlist.

Does our stress on the individual, which can be good in some cases, distort the way we approach worship? When the service begins, do we view the group of people around us as kind of an odd hodgepodge of individuals – as individual people who happened to choose to be at the same place at the same time?

Called, Gathered, Enlightened and Sanctified

God views the worshiping assembly in a different way: he sees us as a group that he himself has gathered into one family, one body. *Christian Worship Supplement* includes two gathering rites that help us remember this at the very beginning of the service.

Some may be acquainted with the concept of the gathering rite. “Remember Your Love” was included in the Lenten resources from Northwestern Publishing House a few years ago, and other gathering rites for Advent have served many congregations. The gathering rites of the supplement are similar. They provide an alternate way of beginning the service. The invocation, confession and absolution, opening hymn verses, prayer, and scripture verses are all wrapped into one thematic unit. Hymn verses include an optional instrumental descant. Quiet keyboard music plays softly in the background during the spoken parts. The music for each of the supplement’s two gathering rites is based on two familiar hymns that



spotlight the means the Holy Spirit uses to gather us together.

Gathered by Baptism

The Holy Spirit uses Holy Baptism to gather individuals into God’s family, to live in the safety and security of his forgiving love. The supplement’s *Gathering Rite on Holy Baptism* begins with this truth: “Baptized into your name most holy, O Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I claim a place, though weak and lowly, among your saints, your chosen host.” Doesn’t this explain well what’s happening as the service begins? The group of people I see is more than a strange collection of diverse individuals who have happened to come together. This group is part of God’s chosen host, people whom God has sought out and made alive through water

and the Word. We are the saints of God, gathered in his saving name to receive his gifts and worship him!

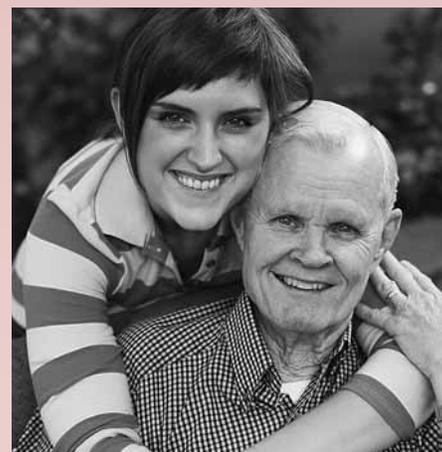
This gathering rite reminds us of how Baptism defines our lives. We live each day in God’s presence with no delusions. By nature we are, as the hymn says, “weak and lowly.” Every day we plead, “Have mercy when I come defiled; forgive, lift up, restore your child.” Yet we speak this plea in faith: “My faithful God, you fail me never; your promise surely will endure.” God answers by absolving us of all our sins. These promises given in Baptism are our lifeblood every day, though we often forget. Remembering Baptism at the outset of a Sunday service can help us appreciate that this sacrament is power for every day of our lives. Gathered

into God's family by water and the Word, we move forward with new resolve, praying, "Let nothing that I am or own serve any will but yours alone."

Gathered by and around the Word

The other gathering rite in the supplement highlights the Spirit's work through the Scriptures. After all, the Holy Spirit has "called me *by the gospel*, enlightened me with his gifts." And who can forget Paul's words: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs*" (Colossians 3:16)? Whenever we gather as God's people, the Word that gave us new birth will be at the center of our gathering. So this gathering rite begins, "Blessed Jesus, at your Word we are gathered all to hear you." We gather not by our own thinking or choosing: "All our knowledge, sense and sight lie in deepest darkness shrouded." Then how can we assemble as one? "Till your Spirit breaks our night with the beams of truth unclouded." The Spirit has called us, gathered us, and enlightened us.

In this gathering rite we remind each other why it is vitally important to come together around God's Word. "God gave his word so 'that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (John 20:31)." "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). We listen to lessons, sermon and songs not simply because it's what we've customarily done; we gather around the Word because it is our life.



Gathering our Young People

One of the challenges of youth ministry has to do with our worship choices. Should we change the form of our services to appeal more to our young people? If so, what should we change? As we seek to strengthen our connection with the teens of our congregations, it's good to remember that corporate worship may be the best of all places to bring people of different generations together. It's the message. We're all sinners; we're all forgiven in Christ. It makes good sense to give such a unifying message a unifying form. Rather than offering a separate, alternate style of worship we think will appeal to teens, it's helpful to consider the value of reinvesting our creative energy into a pattern of worship that already bridges generational gaps: the liturgy.

"For many teens, the church service may be the only time they ever participate with both children and elderly people in a setting of equality. Typically, a 16-year-old boy and his 75-year-old grandmother don't eat at the same restaurants, go to the same movies, or listen to the same radio station. But when they come to the Divine Service they confess their sins in unison and stand together singing their response of gratitude for the gifts, using words that are neither his nor hers, but the expression of a common and shared faith. The music carrying those words is neither 'his music' nor hers, but an expression that is able to transcend both age and personality" (*Yours, Mine, or Ours: Teenagers' Perceptions of Church Music*, by Barbara J. Resch. You can read the full article online at <http://www.lifeoftheworld.com/lotw/04-03/04-03-04.php>).

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6).

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Using the gathering rites

Whether your congregation has used gathering rites before or not, consider some suggestions for making the most of this resource:

- Teach the Bible verses and hymns of the gathering rites to the kids of your Sunday School or elementary school. Review the same verses in teen and adult Bible class. Have the seniors' group discuss them. Then listen to all ages sing and say the same things – a vivid reminder that worship is one of the few activities in our lives that bridges generational gaps.
- Use a gathering rite to highlight a season of the church year. For instance, during the Epiphany season, when the Scripture readings emphasize God making himself known to us in Christ, use the gathering rite that underscores how God shows himself to us through his Word. Or use the Baptism gathering rite during the Easter season to recall that we are raised to new life in Baptism just as Jesus was raised from death (Romans 6).
- Some churches use different orders of service in a rotation (first Sunday of the month is Service of Word and Sacrament, second is Service of the Word, and so on). To add a little variety and to underscore our reason for coming together, consider using one of the gathering rites in that monthly rotation.

One day we'll hear the angel cry out, "*Come, gather together for the great supper of God*" (Revelation 19:17). Until then, let's gather with joy around the Spirit's means of grace, praising our God with one voice!

