

Take a step in worship

O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land which his hands have formed.
O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker!
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.
—Psalm 95:1-7

There is a difference between private devotions and worshipping God in the assembly.

Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there” (Matthew 18:20).

We also know that God hears our prayers wherever we may be and regardless of whom we are with. How is corporate worship different?

In the quiet pre-dawn stillness, we may hear the still small voice of God calling, answering, comforting. That is why some prefer to come into the sanctuary before worship begins and simply sit in silence.

The gathered people of God in Christ Jesus have a power that goes far beyond the silent reflection of the one person. Through the passing of the peace, we are reminded that while blessings come from God, they come to us through others. The covenantal relationship with God has two dimensions – horizontal and vertical – that is, with God, as well as with the community of believers.

How is your relationship with God and with others reflected, strengthened, and lived out in worship?

Our liturgy has been handed down through the centuries, with some minor changes over time. But when we come together to worship, every movement has a meaning and that meaning has not changed over the centuries. There are still ritual procedures for gathering, hearing the word, sharing the meal and being sent out. We do these things in the twenty-first century for the same reasons they were done in the third century.

The pattern for the service of Holy Communion is a pattern about what God is doing:

Gathering: The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

Word: God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

Meal: God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

Sending: God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

One leads into the next.

The pattern is not 4 distinct parts, but one unfolding story – a gospel story.

Think of how this shape for worship is the shape of the Gospel story:

At the start, Jesus is baptized.

Then there are stories upon stories of God's work in Jesus Christ,
the Word made flesh coming to expression.

Then there is the meal, the passion, and the resurrection.

And finally there is a command to the disciples to "go and tell"

In Mark, the women who discovered the empty tomb are sent back to the beginning, to Galilee.

In Matthew the resurrected Christ gives the command to the disciples to go teach and baptize remembering Christ's presence.

In Luke the disciples realize their encounter the risen Christ on the road and in the breaking of bread.

In John the risen Christ commands Peter to "feed my sheep."

This shape for worship is also biblically evident in the earliest church as described in the Acts of the Apostles: (Acts 2:42-47)

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (NRSV)

Here was the shape of the gathering of Christians witnessed to in scripture and based on scripture, devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching about Christ, fellowship, meal, prayers, holding things in common, and distributing gifts where there was need. They were assembled together around scripture, meal, bath, prayer, offering, mission.

There is a correspondence between the Jesus stories and what we do in worship since the earliest Christian and still today even if the details look different from place to place.

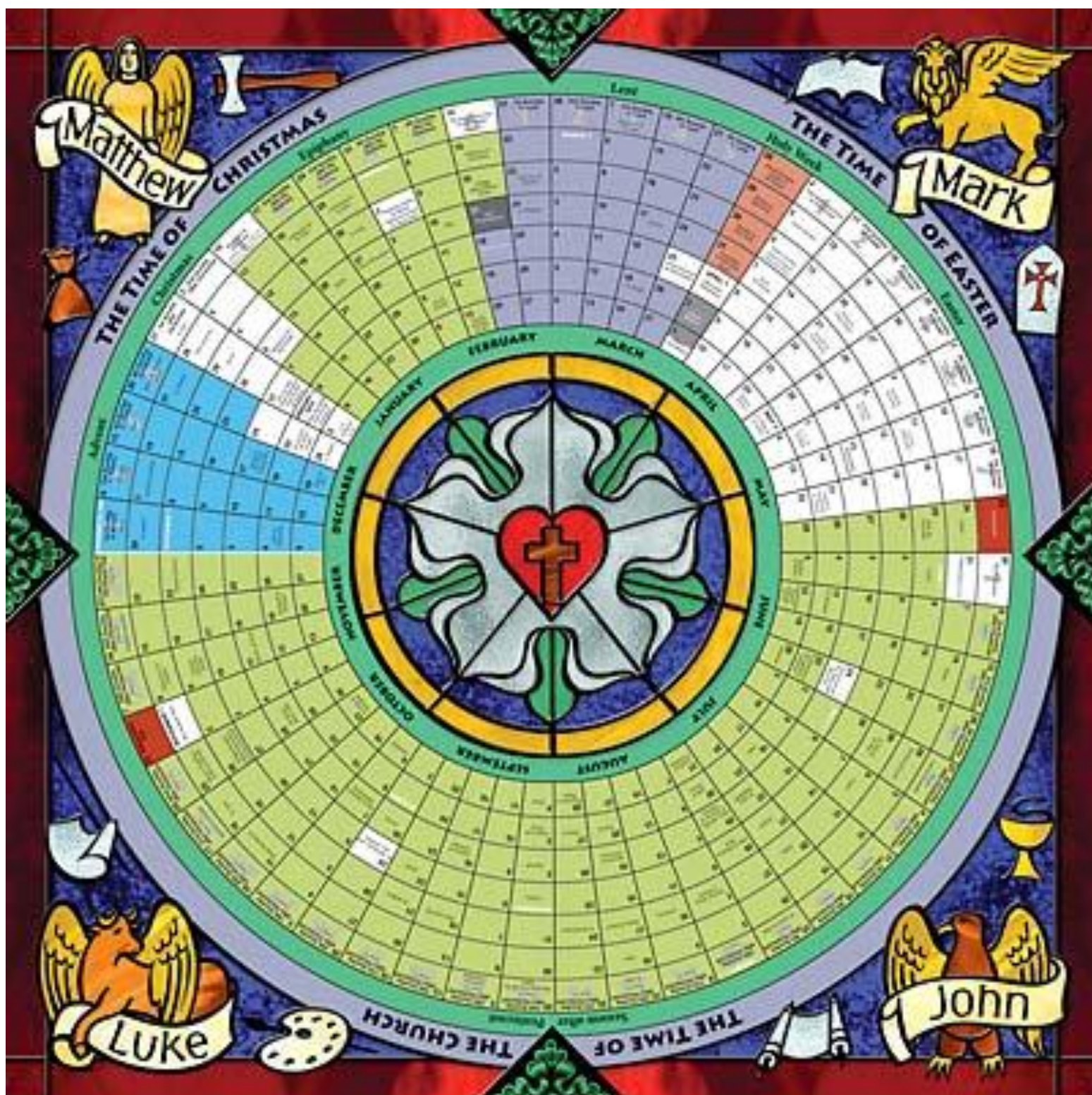
God draws us together.

God names us as beloved children when we are washed in the water.

We encounter the living word of God through narrative and story, song and prayer.

God sets the table with bread and wine and bids us to eat. We are transformed by the living presence of Christ and then God sends us out – urges us out – to share the good news only to be drawn back in again.

The church year is celebrated on an annual cycle that begins with Advent and journeys through the period of waiting for the birth of Jesus, Jesus' birth, the revelation of Jesus' divine identity and power, then through his suffering, death, and resurrection. Half of the church year follows the Day of Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit) and celebrates the life of the Holy Spirit in the church. The lectionary of the church centers on a specific gospel for each of three years, focusing on Matthew one year, followed by Mark the next, then Luke. The material in the gospel of John is used every year to supplement the current gospel year.



Take a step in your worship life

- Attend morning prayer, a service that is held at Church of the Cross Monday-Thursday at 9 am. If you work or are otherwise unable to be at church during that time, stop where you are and pray for a few minutes between 9 and 9:30, Monday-Thursday. Know that you are praying in concert with people at church.
- Arrive at Sunday worship early. The choir usually holds a rehearsal from 9-9:45 am. Arrive in time to sit quietly during their rehearsal and pray. Consider how their life together contributes to your sense of worship. At 9:45, the sanctuary is relatively quiet. This is a good opportunity to meditate and prepare yourself for worship.
- Offer to assist in worship. There are plenty of opportunities to read the lessons, assist with communion, pray with others, read the Word for Children, sing in the choir, set up communion, and work with special services. Assisting with worship can be a vehicle toward enhancing your worship life.
- Make worship a priority. Set aside Sunday mornings for worship and do your best to keep other commitments from creeping into that time slot.
- Be attentive to the church year and the movements of the community in the various seasons of the year. The Crossbeams carries articles related to the church season intended to enhance your worship life.
- Take advantage of special services that occur throughout the church year, particularly the services during Holy Week that trace the events in the last week of Jesus' life.
- Reflect on worship after you have attended. What did God speak to you? What blessings did you receive? How were you challenged? Who did you meet?
- Share your worship experience with your friends and family. Share the difference worshipping make for you. Most sermons are recorded and available on the church website. You can listen to sermons any time you want and you can email links to these sermons to other people.
- Go on a renewal weekend or retreat. The pastors can guide you toward meaningful experiences.

As with every mark of discipleship, the pastors are available to meet with you for prayer, consultation and guidance as you take new steps. Remember that taking these steps in worship is an act of spiritual growth and deepening discipleship. May God bless your growth and your worship life.