

CATECHESIS FOR LIFE

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For the congregation's weekly exercise in the doctrine of the faith and the Scriptures

This series considers the parts of the Divine Service. The Church has developed the structure of the Divine Service over the past two millennia to serve the grace of God in Jesus Christ, to be received by faith. If it is “simply what we do,” or if we think that by doing it without understanding (or even with understanding) we merit grace, we are not using it aright. Even the sacraments themselves do not save us “ex opere operato,” simply “by act of doing,” but are meant to be received by faith. “For the words ‘for you’ require all hearts to believe” [SC VI]. Therefore, we study the Divine Service, so that (1) we ourselves might participate in understanding and faith; and (2) we should be prepared to give a reason to anyone who asks for the hope that is given us through these things [1 Pet 3:15].

Divine Service Setting Three (LSB 184–202) traces its roots back through Lutheran Worship (1982) and The Lutheran Hymnal (1941) to the Common Service of 1888. This was a joint project of most Lutherans in America to produce a liturgy in English “by the common consent of the pure Lutheran liturgies of the sixteenth century.” This service rose “above the provincialism and nationalism that characterized developments in Europe. It provided a liturgy...of universal scope and influence...more representative of Lutheranism in its best estate than any other order of service that could be named.”***

* Luther Reed, “The Common Service in the Life of the Church,” *The Lutheran Quarterly* 12 (1939): 9–10. ** idem, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 194–195.

The Divine Service (Preparation): Invocation 14–16th C.

P In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen. *Matthew 28:19b; [18:20]*

The invocation has its roots in Baptism. In the Baptism of Jesus God is revealed for who he is in himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 4:16–17). In your baptism, his name is put upon you (Matt 28:19). When Christians assemble to hear God’s Word, to eat his Supper, and to respond in prayer and praise, it is fitting that it should be explicitly “in God’s name.” “For,” our Lord says, “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20; also Exod 20:24).

Our grammarians will note that the invocation isn’t a complete sentence. It is simply a prepositional phrase, which doesn’t stand alone. Sometimes grammatical discomfort leads a pastor to say, “We make our beginning in the name,” but this is not the sense. That it is a fragment reflects that it is God who began what matters at your baptism (John 1:12–13) His work now continues in what follows (John 5:17). The pastor speaks the invocation, with New Testament precision “putting God’s name on the people” (Num 6:16–20), with the sign of the cross, as it is in Jesus that God’s name is on us. The people may trace the sign of the cross over themselves as a reminder that, as at their baptisms, they remain “marked as those redeemed by Christ the Crucified. They also respond with the first “Amen” of the service, that is, “yes, yes, it shall be so!” We gather as those surely baptized into God’s name, and he is surely with us. Such is the certainty of our Christian worship.