

Reflections on Worship Part 2

By Vicar Filipek

Introduction

This is the second of my three part series *Reflections on Worship* that was started back in October. The question that is addressed in this article deals specifically with what worship actually is. Or put differently, what happens in worship. Next month, we will again take a break from *Reflections on Worship*, and take time to ponder Pastor Willig's April article. In May, the series will be completed with the third and final article on worship practices. With that we turn to this month's article, dealing specifically with the question, "What is Worship?"

What is Worship?

This is a question I ask people from time to time. Undoubtedly, the most frequent response to this question is "I think worship is praising God for all the wonderful things that he has given us and done for us". While that is certainly a part of it, as there is certainly a human element to worship, this answer, in and of itself, fails to reflect the whole truth of what worship actually is. To understand the whole truth of what worship actually is, to answer this question, to understand what happens in worship, we must first turn away from our sinful thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about what worship is, and turn to God's Word, his Holy Scripture, where we find out what truly happens in worship. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 the Apostle Paul clearly articulates what happened in their worship services at the Christian Church in Corinth. Paul writes, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except *Jesus Christ and him crucified*. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." Now, I want you to notice what happens when the Apostle Paul is among the people of, in this instance, Corinth. First and foremost, the essence/heart of worship, Jesus Christ crucified and risen, is preached. This is because like the Bible, a Christian's life centers on Jesus Christ and his work of salvation. And as the Apostle Paul tells us, Worship is no different. Everything in Worship centers on Jesus Christ and the

forgiveness of sins. And it is Jesus Christ who comes to give us His gift of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, through his word and sacrament. This is exactly why the title of the worship service every week in the hymnal is, *The Divine Service*. Extremely fitting title isn't it, as God serves us, his people through word and sacrament. And this is the first part and most essential part of worship. The second part of worship is what happens later in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Namely, they praise God for all the wonderful things that he has given to and done for them. Consequently, one could say that worship is God giving us his gifts of forgiveness and new life to us, his people, via his means of grace, his word and sacrament; and us receiving those gifts by faith and responding by faith in thanksgiving and praise.

What is Worship, Summary

By far, in my years of study, I have not found a more clear and concise summary of what worship is than that of Professor Norman Nagel, as printed in the introduction to the Hymnal *Lutheran Worship*. Dr. Nagel writes, "Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise... Saying back to Him what He has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure. Most true and sure is His name, which He put upon us with the water of our Baptism. We are His. This we acknowledge at the beginning of the Divine Service. Where His name is, there is He. Before Him we acknowledge that we are sinners and we plead for forgiveness. His forgiveness is given us, and we, freed and forgiven, acclaim Him as our great and gracious God as we apply to ourselves the words he has used to make himself known to us. The rhythm of our worship is from Him to us, and then from us back to Him. He gifts His gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build one another up as we speak to one another in Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Our Lord gives us His body to eat and His blood to drink. Finally, His blessing moves us out into our calling, where His gifts have their fruition."

In Christ,

Vicar Filipek 