

## THE ROAD WHERE FAITH IS FOUND

### THE GIFTS ARE OURS EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP • 505

COMMUNICATING THE FAITH. USING WORDS IF NECESSARY.



A mighty fortress is our God,  
a bulwark never failing;  
our helper frees us from the flood  
of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe,  
forsworn to work us woe,  
with guile and dreadful might  
is armed to wage the fight:  
on earth there is not equal.

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 505, Hedge translation, stanza 1*

*Kathy Martin & Peter Hanson write...*

His name is Joseph. He is five years old. He attends Sunday School and church almost every Sunday. His mother tells us that on occasion, Joseph dresses up in a long white t-shirt, with a couple of towels knotted together to form a stole around his neck and welcomes everyone who comes to visit. He greets them at the door, makes them feel at home and offers one and all a meal. (just like church) How often when we played church at home we would imitate the ushers and take up an offering!

Things have changed! Joseph understands, as well as he is able, church ... faith ... gifts ... baptism ... the Lord's Supper. Then in his home with his parents, family and friends, Joseph rehearses and enacts what he has seen and heard on Sunday mornings. It has been and is a part of his life; worship, liturgy, proclamation, the signing of the cross, weekly Eucharist, assisting with worship, gathering together for fellowship, laughing, singing, and celebrating the goodness of God. These things have shaped Joseph's life and with his play he too is shaping the lives of others.

In the waters of baptism, we as parents, sponsors and members of the body of Christ are called and commissioned to teach, proclaim, model and nurture the gifts of faith. Our new worship book, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (Holy Baptism, page 228)* has more clearly articulated the responsibilities with which all of us are entrusted in Holy Baptism. Parents of baptismal candidates are invited

“to live with *them* among God’s faithful people,  
bring *them* to the word of God and the holy supper,  
teach them the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,  
place in *their* hands the holy scriptures,  
and nurture them in faith and prayer,  
so that *your children* may learn to trust God,  
proclaim Christ through word and deed,  
care for others and the world God made,  
and work for justice and peace.

Parents are asked “Do you promise to help your children grow in the Christian faith and life?”

Thereafter, sponsors are asked, “do you promise to nurture *these persons* in the Christian faith as you are empowered by God’s Spirit, and to help *them* live in the covenant of baptism and in communion with the church?”

This is a wonderful expansion of the responsibilities that were listed in *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Moreover, it is not only the parents and sponsors who are called to nurture and help the baptized to live out this covenant in their daily lives and in communion with the church. In our new worship book the gathered assembly on behalf of the whole church, promises to help with this essential task of ministry as well. This is not something new. This community responsibility was implicit in *Lutheran Book of Worship* and expressed with the words “we welcome you into the Lord’s family, we receive you as fellow members of the body of Christ.” *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* more clearly expresses this responsibility as the question is asked, “People of God, do you promise to support and pray for name/s in their new life in Christ?” As this question makes clear, faith-formation is not simply the task of the parents or sponsors. Faith-formation is the responsibility of all of God’s people.

If we in our own strength confide,  
our striving turns to losing;  
the righteous one fights by our side,  
the one of God’s own choosing.  
You ask who this may be:  
Christ Jesus, it is he,  
the Lord of hosts by name.  
No other God we claim!  
None else can win the battle.

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 505, Hedge translation, stanza 2*

On any given Sunday morning in our congregation a quick glance around the worship space reveals people in many different places in their faith journeys. Near the back sits a woman who has recently returned to church following the death of her husband. As a child she was eager for Sunday school, for church and God, but over the years she gradually slipped away. Yet at this crisis point in her life, at the death of her husband, the familiar cadence of the liturgy, the hymns, and scripture readings bring hope into the gaping abyss of loss. Deep within her the patterns of faith formed so many years ago as a child bring hope and comfort. Each Sunday as she gathers with God’s people she remembers and hears once again the story that has shaped her in ways she could never forget—a sung remembrance of God’s faithfulness and a hope-filled future.

On the floor, right up front, in the first row where there is always plenty of room, a little four year old is stretched out on the ground. Scattered about him are pieces of a puzzle that he is carefully putting together. Every so often he raises his head, listening, waiting, watching for his cues in the liturgy. For those places and times where he is called to respond, to participate. But in some ways that statement is

not really true. For this wee one is completely engaged in the rhythm worship from start to finish. As the prayer of the day finishes he takes his place on the chancel stairs eager to help the congregation understand the scriptures through the faith-filled eyes of a child. Then he quietly returns to his puzzle for the lessons and psalm. Week after week the words wash over him. Later in the service he will mill through the congregation sharing the peace and perhaps take his turn as one of our communion assistants. Watching him the whole congregation, particularly our seniors, are encouraged. God is here, faith is growing, the gifts really are ours!

As the worship service begins, the balcony looks half empty. The doors continually open and close as latecomers and people from Sunday school slip into their places. Gradually the space becomes comfortably full. Just behind the glass sit a couple of our youth, a sister and her younger brother. They too have walked in late. It has just been one of those mornings when it took longer than expected to get things put away after the Sunday school class that they teach for the Grade 1's and 2's. Week after week they crawl out of bed early enough to make the half hour drive from another community so the sister can be here to teach Sunday school at 9:15 in the morning. Her brother comes along to help. In many and various ways the community gathers together around word and sacrament to be formed into living witnesses, living words sent forth into the world to proclaim the gospel of Christ with their lives.

Here at Mount Olive we have used a number of tools for faith-formation: faith chests, splashed with promise, faith talk cards, etc. These have been very helpful in providing opportunities for discussion, growth and modeling.

In an All Saints Day sermon, Barbara Brown Taylor talks about celebrating baptism on this day so that the new saints have opportunity to meet the old saints: "We want our children and all those who are new to Christ's body to know who their ancestors are." While this is very true, it is also obvious that faith-formation is not unidirectional, from older to younger, from parents and grandparents to children. The reverse of this handing down of the faith is also true. There is a kind of "handing up" of the faith, as well, as old and young journey together along the road following Christ in a life of faithful service and discipleship.

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* has a part to play in the faith-formation of God's people —and not simply on Sunday morning. It is full of information to enhance our understanding of the faith. For instance, there is a section (page 1154) called *Scripture and Worship* that lists the biblical passages that form the backbone of our worship life together.

This book is a rich resource that can enhance the devotional life of individuals and families. In home visits, people often ask for help with their daily bible reading. Our new hymnal includes a *Daily Lectionary* (pages 1121 - 1153) —a set of daily scripture lessons that either reflect on the readings for the Sunday previous or anticipate the readings for the Sunday to follow. Thus, beginning on Thursday the readings focus on the texts that will be read on the following Sunday. Then on Monday and on the days after, the lessons continue to amplify the readings heard the previous Sunday. This is an excellent catechetical format. Reading and rereading these scriptures, we are immersed in God's word all week long. Moreover, we read these texts alongside other Lutherans across North America, and, as this new *Daily Lectionary* —created by the Consultation on Common Texts— is adopted ecumenically, alongside Christians of every stripe.

In addition, our new worship book includes Luther's *Small Catechism*. Close at hand are the essentials of the Christian faith, the basics: the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, together with Luther's explanations. In addition, families and individuals have quick access to Luther's teaching on the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. The prayers of blessing for morning and evening follow, along with table blessings. All these remind us of our need for God's grace in every aspect of our lives so that we might live gently with God, with one another and with all of creation.

Though all the world with devils fill  
and threaten to devour us,  
we tremble not, we trust God's will:  
they cannot overpower us.  
Though Satan rant and rage,  
in fiercest war engage,  
this tyrant's doomed to fail;  
God's judgement must prevail!  
One little word shall triumph.

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 505, Hedge translation, stanza 3*

As most of us know, Luther created the *Small Catechism* for use in the home, to assist parents as they taught the faith to their children, a pattern for Christian faith-formation. It is wonderful to have this resource once again included in our worship book alongside our hymns, liturgies, and prayers. With a bible and a gift copy of the new *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, people have a marvellous tool box for faith-formation in their own home to use throughout the day, whether at work, at rest or at play; a way of making the connection between the Sunday assembly and the lives we live the rest of the week in a world that knows all too well the realities of brokenness and pain.

Out of darkness and despair, on Easter morning, Mary Magdalene is transformed from occupying a place of grief, sorrow, fear and weeping to one of good news, of happy proclamation, of telling the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." That's what proclamation is all about: telling good news, sharing the story, proclaiming that the unexpected and unnatural has taken place. One expects loss, grief, death and mourning. That is just the natural order of things. But then on Easter the stone is rolled back shattering our expectations. This is the good news we celebrate and proclaim: Christ is alive. Christ is living. Christ is in our midst. Jesus was crucified, died and was buried but on the third day he rose from the dead. Alleluia, alleluia!!

Such is the proclamation of Mary! (Mary Magdalene's festival day is July 22. See *Evangelical Lutheran Worship, pages 16 and 57.*) Such is the proclamation that has been handed down from generation to generation!. Such is the proclamation of the church!

It is this reality that is our hope, our promise and our trust. It is this truth that we sing in Luther's hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God, Evangelical Lutheran Worship 505*: "The Spirit and the gifts are ours, for God with us is living. ... The kingdom's ours forever!

God's Word shall stand above the powers,  
shall end all their thanksgiving.  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours,  
for God with us is living.  
Let goods and kindred go,  
this mortal life also;  
though all of these be gone,  
they yet have nothing won.  
The kingdom's ours forever!

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 505, Hedge translation, stanza 3*

For God with us is living, real, alive and present. Present in word and sacrament. Present in God's word proclaimed, in water that is splashed, in bread that is broken, in wine that is poured —concrete, visible, tangible signs of God's grace.

Worship touches us, shapes us, empowers us to be like Mary Magdalene, to be like Martin Luther, to be like little Joseph. Worship empowers us to go and proclaim, to go and tell, to go and share—with our lips, with our bodies, with our lives— all that we have seen, heard, and experienced.

Through song and prayer, through Scripture readings and sacraments—through all that transpires as God's people gather for worship— we proclaim that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Thanks be to God. The kingdom's ours forever!

Kathy Martin  
and Peter Hanson.

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*In 2002, the ELCIC's Program Committee for Worship invited a number of bishops, pastors and teachers to write a series of pastoral letters under the title "Reclaiming Our Birthright: Pastoral Letters on the Every-Sunday Celebration of Holy Communion."*

*Introduced by Bishop Raymond Schultz, the letters had a two-fold thrust: They were designed to assist pastors and congregational leaders in their reflection and teaching on the matter of every-Sunday Holy Communion and to help the people of God to faithfully and deliberately reclaim their baptismal birthright.*

*These essays, together with all of the essays in this The Road Where Faith Is Found series, are available on the ELCIC + Worship Matters page at Lift Up Your Hearts [www.worship.ca](http://www.worship.ca).*