

# THE SPRINGFIELDER

Vol. XXX

Winter, 1967

No. 4

THE SPRINGFIELDER is published quarterly by the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

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*Indexed in* INDEX TO RELIGIOUS PERIODICAL LITERATURE, *published by the American Theological Library Association, Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey.*

Clergy changes of address reported to Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, will also cover mailing change of *The Springfielder*. Other changes of address should be sent to the Business Manager of *The Springfielder*, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois.

Address communications to the Editor, Erich H. Heintzen, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois.

# The Joy of Worship

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*The following article originally formed the third part of an essay by the same author, entitled *The Mission of Christ's People in Worship*.*

FOR many people worship is too somber and staid an affair to include much joy. But for the people of Christ worship should be joyous. After all, in worship we respond to the God whose goodness manifests itself in infinitely varied ways in our lives. Our liturgy, recognizes the close connection between worshipping and rejoicing. Therefore the liturgy sounds a note of joy. When we are aware of this it will help our worshipping to be a rejoicing.

In the liturgy joy is tied to praise. The liturgy is permeated with praise. All liturgy is thanksgiving to God for what He has done in Christ. The actions of God for man's salvation are described, and the great events in God's dealings with men are commemorated.

The liturgy presents our Lord's birth, His healing ministry, His crucifixion, His resurrection. The Gloria in Excelsis is a reminder of the Incarnation, of Christ's birth. The Gloria comes as a response to the Kyrie which conveys humble reliance on the mercy of God. In the confidence that God's mercy is ours, we break forth into a triumphant hymn of gratitude. God has sent His Son into the world, His Son has saved us and is now in glory at God's right hand, using His divine power fully for the good of His own. In the Gospel lesson our attention is focused on Christ and upon His ministry. Christ Himself is speaking to us. We are transported back across the years to the Sea of Galilee, the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, Samaria. Grateful for the privilege of hearing Christ speak, we sing a short response of praise just before and after the Gospel. The Gradual, which follows the Epistle, is likewise a thanksgiving. The first part of the Gradual, which consists of a Psalm verse or verses, and sometimes a verse from the New Testament, looks back upon the thought of the Epistle and usually expresses that thought in praise. The last portion of the Gradual is the Alleluia. Alleluia is the Greek form of the Hebrew word meaning "praise ye the Lord." The Gradual is thus the bridge which unites the thoughts of the apostles with the words of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The Nunc Dimittis, which follows the Holy Communion, is our response of praise to the blessings God has given us in the Sacrament of the Altar. When we see how the liturgy voices God's praise in God's deeds and how our response is often in the form of thanksgiving, there will be joy in our worship. Thanking and rejoicing go together. There can be no joy without thankfulness. The person who has a thankful heart will also be a person who rejoices. The joys of worship flow from thankfulness.

An aspect of worship's joy is celebration. The liturgy helps us to do just that, to celebrate. There is an affinity between what we are doing in worship and what believers of all ages have done. The familiar words of Psalm 122, "I was glad when they said to me, 'let us go to the house of the Lord,'" express David's joy in attending the worship services in the temple at Jerusalem. The opening words of Psalm 136 set forth a note of joy in the well known words of praise: "O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever." The Jewish festivals, especially the Feast of Tabernacles and of the Passover, were occasions of great joy for the Jewish people. Our liturgy, with its frequent quotations from the Psalms, harks back to the joy of the Old Testament believers.

This joyous note was not lacking among the New Testament believers. The words of Paul in Colossians 3:16 indicate that also for them worship was celebration. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Here was the congregation of the redeemed joining in festal joy around Christ's Word and in Christ's name. We worship in the train of the believers of all times when we enter His courts with joy, celebrating the great things God has done for us in Christ.

In our liturgy we actually ask God to give us joy. We do not ask for salvation, for that we already have. We ask for joy, and more specifically as in the Offertory, a restoration of joy. This joy is not primarily feeling and sentiment. It is a matter of being joyful and of acting with joy. This joy is a part of the life of Christ in us. It has the cross and the resurrection of Christ at its center. It is a joy in Christ. What we are seeking then is a fuller vision of what it means to be a Christian.<sup>2</sup> What we want is the joy of it all—the joy of forgiveness, of victory, of killing the self and of letting Christ rise in us.

This is a joy that does not feed on success or failure. It is a joy that surface pain cannot kill, that inner distress cannot destroy. The cross currents of life will not upset it. Think of the Apostle Paul. No matter what happened to him, in spite of what he had been, his joy could not be shaken, for he stood on Christ. This is not to say that the Christian will have no sorrow in his life. Far from it. Outward circumstances may often test the reality of his joy, but if it is indeed a joy in the crucified and risen Christ, the changes of our earthly life will not be able to eradicate it. Even in times of sickness and unemployment, crop failure and inflation, we can show the deep calm joy of Christ. In this way the joy that has been restored to us in church is carried into life. Our joy is never restricted to the formal worship service.

Since this joy is not a feeling but a way of life, it is a freeing joy. The more we experience this joy, the more we are free from

fears that inhibit us, and the more we will see that worship takes in all of life. Rejoicing will become the keynote not only of our worship in church but of our whole life. Our life will become celebration, for we are free to rejoice always.

### *Channels of Joy*

Because this joy is a gift as well as the salvation that is part of it, we need to keep ourselves in contact with the channels through which God bestows this gift. That means keeping close to the Word and to the Sacraments. The joy of worship is conveyed to us in a unique way through Holy Communion.

The entire Communion liturgy keynotes joy. The word "Eucharist," a word often used for Holy Communion, comes from a Greek word meaning praise. This praise is linked with joy. In the Sanctus we unite with angels and archangels and with the whole church in heaven and on earth to praise the triune God. The Sanctus includes the words with which the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus as their King on the first Palm Sunday: "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." We use the same words in welcoming our King who comes to us, not on a donkey, but still humbly in bread and wine. Then, receiving His body and blood, "God's own sacrifice complete" is applied to us personally and individually as a seal of the forgiveness of sins. No wonder there is joy.

The joy in Holy Communion is a foretaste of heavenly joy when we shall be privileged guests of the Lamb of God. The Lord's Supper points us to the time when our Lord will eat and drink with His own in His Father's Kingdom. That is why the Communion hymns as well as the Communion liturgy are filled with notes of awe, triumph, exaltation, and doxology. The Communion service is not a place to mourn. We don't need to "go to" it attired in black. Here on earth already the glory of the future kingdom is shining on the assembled people of God.

Holy Communion brings us joy because it unites us with Him who is the source of joy, Jesus Himself. Here Christ effects the closest fellowship between Himself and His people.<sup>3</sup> This is underscored by the words spoken to each communicant: "The Body of Christ given for you, the Blood of Christ shed for you." The Lord's Supper is the way Christ chose to be with His own in a specially intimate way. He will not be far off but assures us that we are joined to Him in a union that is wonderfully close. He who said, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might be in you and your joy might be full" (John 15:11), is present with us and in us. United with Him who is the fountain of joy, it is possible for us to have joy.

And it is not simply a matter of knowing joy by ourselves. We can rejoice together with other Christians. In Holy Communion Christ binds us not only to Himself but to our fellow believers in a joyous bond of faith. "We being many are one bread

and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). All who partake of the sacramental bread also partake of Christ's Body. Since Christ is not divided, all communicants are united in a spiritual body. The Lord's Supper is a means of indicating our spiritual unity in Christ, our common Lord. By partaking of the Lord's Supper we confess our faith. The Lord's Supper also strengthens us in our one faith. This is surely cause for joy.

Is the Lord's Supper more necessary for our joy than the sermon? We make a mistake when we attempt to estimate the respective value of the sermon and of the Sacrament and set them against each other. Both are important. There is no command in Scripture that the Lord's Supper be celebrated every Sunday. When Christ said, "oft" or "often," He meant only that each time, whenever, we partake of the Sacrament we do it in remembrance of Him. The frequency of Communion should be determined by our need. God has chosen to communicate with us primarily through words, and so we read and hear Holy Scripture. But because our faith is weak and our flesh is strong, God has chosen to use also other means to strengthen us. He has seen fit to take ordinary bread and wine, to consecrate them for heavenly use, with the promise that when we eat and drink we will receive heavenly benefits. Realizing how we need strengthening of faith and increase of joy, we will use all the means God has given us. While the Gospel is preached to people generally, the Lord's Supper brings God's grace to communicants individually, not only through their sense of hearing but through their sense of sight and taste. Thus sermon and sacrament complement each other as means of bringing joy.

#### *Creative Center*

Outside the regular use of Word and Sacrament, what can we do that our congregations might grow in the joy of worship? We can help them to understand that worship is the creative center of the church's activity. There are groups in every congregation, consisting of older and younger men and women, middle aged people, single people, married people, children and infants, people in various occupations and with various levels of education. What is important is that each group, whether these groups are formed on the basis of sex, age, cultural interests or neighborhood, realizes that it is a responsible part of the larger group, the congregation. Cliques should not be permitted to form. A clique has developed when a group breaks away to build up its own life alongside that of the congregation and becomes self-sufficient.<sup>1</sup> A clique may already have developed when a group persists in serving in ways that are no longer needed. Cliques can be avoided when each group is anchored in the church's worship.

This is not to say that groups cannot have their own worship services. They can and they should. But there is a limit to the direct and active part they can take in worship as separate groups.

Their worship must, therefore, always be subordinated to the main service of the whole congregation. Otherwise the unity of the body can be disrupted. All the groups need to look upon the main Sunday service as the center of their lives and the secret of their strength.

If this is to come about, the liturgy cannot be regarded as just a decorative setting for the sermon. It cannot be regarded as a little ceremony to be gotten over with or a performance to be watched. Rather, it must be seen as a divine-human drama in which we who are kings and priests before God actively participate. There must be a whole hearted participation and an enthusiastic involvement. The more people are able to let themselves go spiritually so that they really throw themselves into the grandeur of the Sunday morning worship in word and act, making it the expression of their own devotion, the more they will grow in the joy of worship. They will know that here in the worship service God has allowed His heaven to touch and to bless our sin-sick earth.

Members will grow in the joy of worship also when they are helped to see how their baptism relates to worship. Our baptism is at the root of our worship. Holy Baptism is the means by which God took us out of our isolated evil and made us members of His Church. In baptism He washed away our guilt and gave us a new birth. He gave us the Holy Spirit and made us sharers in Christ's victory. Because of what God did for us in baptism, worship has become possible for us.

Specifically, how does our baptism tie in with our worshipping in church and in our daily lives? St. Paul reminds us (Rom. 6:4), "We were buried therefore with Him (Christ) by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." The apostle is saying that our inherited sinfulness must, by continual sorrow and repentance, be drowned and die and the new life in us must continually come forth. What happened at our baptism must continue to happen: the sinful self must be slain and the new man in us must be resurrected. That is why a truly Christian life is simply a continual baptism (Large Catechism IV, *Trig.*, p. 753). To confess our sins, to give up dependence on our own goodness as meriting salvation, to thank God, to serve God with a holy life—this is worship, whether we do it in church or somewhere else. That is why the Christian life, the worshipping life, is a re-enactment and constant repetition of our baptism. The effects of baptism are life long. Our baptism is a power for enriching and enlarging our worship. To use our baptism in this way is to increase our joy in worship.

#### *Wider Than Church Going*

Growth in worship joy will take place, furthermore, when church members are guided in understanding that worship is wider than church going. Our Confessions make it clear that the mere

following of prescribed forms is not worship. "Ceremonies and church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, but are introduced in the Church . . . for the sake of good order and propriety . . . in and of themselves, are no worship of God nor any part of it" (F. C., X, *Trig.*, pp. 1053-1055). What constitutes worship is faith in Jesus in our hearts and the transformation that faith brings about in our lives. In other words, to worship well is to live well.<sup>5</sup> This kind of worship is described by St. Paul:

"I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:1-2).

The emphasis here is on presenting our whole self to God so that, while worshipping in the world, we are not conformed to the world. Because of the mercy God has bestowed on us, we will want to present our bodies as a holy sacrifice. It is through our body that sin invades our being. Satan can make use of our ears and eyes to gain entry. But our bodies are to be kept open to God. To keep them so is acceptable to God because of Christ and our relationship to Him. Whenever we say No to sin in our bodies and Yes to what is good before God, the effects of Christ's once and for all sacrifice are showing in us. This, says Paul, is our spiritual worship.

Such a presenting of our bodies involves the renewal of our minds. Inward transformation is necessary. We cannot think as before, simply because we are in a daily process of renewal. We will want to mind the things of the Spirit and to cease minding the things of the flesh. We will be led by the Spirit of God in our very mind. Thus not only outwardly but inwardly we will be different from the world. Our thinking, speaking and doing will no longer conform to the ways of the evil world. Worshiping is the presenting of our bodies and minds as a sacrifice to God. This means that we are nonconformists in the world.

But we are still in the world and among the people in the world. Therefore, if our worship is to be meaningful, it will have to be directed toward people. Listen to what the writer to the Hebrews says:

"Therefore let us go forth to Him outside the camp, bearing abuse for Him. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb. 13:13-16).

Notice how praising God and sharing with people are put alongside each other. It would seem that the more truly we praise God, the more genuinely we will help people.

We will do good and not evil to people. Good can be accomplished by the friendly word, the supporting hand, the act of kindness. In so doing we share with others gifts God has given us—gifts of speech, hospitality, teaching, admonition. We are to share especially with our fellow Christians. Scripture reminds us that we are to do good to all men but especially to those within the fellowship of faith (Gal. 6:10). The good deeds we are to perform are specified by James: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). So you see, we cannot go into an ivory tower and hide off somewhere in a corner. We will have to be in the world, serving the world of people. To the sacrifice of our praise is added the sacrifice of our service. This is a hard lesson to learn, but without it all our singing and saying will have little effect.<sup>6</sup>

Now this serving will cost us something—comfort, ease, convenience. We will sometimes be misunderstood. There is a costing quality to the Christian life. There will be failures at times, but our failures do not ruin our worship because our failures are forgiven. Our Lord reminds us: "In the world ye shall have tribulations," but He also encourages us: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

We serve also by our routine daily activity. Each of us has an occupation, a unique calling, in which certain things are expected of us. We worship when we work at our jobs as Christians. Then our occupation, no matter what it is, will be a glorifying of God. Men and women today need to see their daily tasks in such an eternal dimension. St. Paul put it well, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Whether you prepare a meal, or wash diapers, or write reports, or build a house, or plough the fields, it can all be done to the glory of God. The point is, all things glorify God if we mean they should. To hear the Word of God and to go to Communion gives God glory. But to take food in thankfulness and temperance gives Him glory too. To lift up your hands in prayer gives God glory. But a man with a dung fork in his hand is glorifying God, too.<sup>7</sup> This is how we Christians are to look at our lives. Everything is worthwhile that glorifies God. We worship when we live as Christians in everything and everywhere. To grasp this is to find joy in worship.

Finally, if our people are to grow in the joy of worship, they must not simply be told what worship is, nor should they be treated only to a history of Christian worship. Both of these are important, but what is needed, above all, is for Christians to be given an opportunity to practice worship. Only in this way can the meaning of worship be refreshed. The whole endeavor of the Church needs



to be centered in helping people to worship thoughtfully and understandingly.<sup>8</sup> When a member really knows what he is doing and what is going on in a service of worship, he will want to come. If people are to know and feel what worship is, they cannot just talk about worship but they must worship. Here the pastor plays a significant role. When he is evidently eager and joyous in leading his people in worship, the people will be led to regard each opportunity for worship as a joyous occasion. They will look upon the worship service as an opportunity for praising God, for strengthening their hold on God through the Gospel, for praying for each other and for all men, and for sharing spiritual gifts through the hymns, the Sacraments, and the responses. Furthermore, they will come to see worship as a bringing to God of the sacrifice of themselves. Worship is always an intensely personal thing, involving people thinking about how God works in their lives. We will grow in the joy of worship as we experience worship. To such joy we have been called in Christ. Such is the mission of Christ's people in worship.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Egar S. Brown, *Living the Liturgy* (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 58.
2. Paul W. F. Harms, *Spirit of Power* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 75.
3. William D. Streng, *Toward Meaning in Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), p. 76.
4. Wilhelm Hahn, *Worship and Congregation* (Ecumenical Studies in Worship. Translated by Geoffrey Buswell. Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 64.
5. Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), p. 78.
6. Ernest B. Koenker, *Worship in Word and Sacrament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 109.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
8. Richard R. Caemmerer, *Feeding and Leading* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), p. 21.