



# Liturgical Thought

## EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY<sup>1</sup>

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### Why are the candles in the chancel lit from bottom to top and extinguished top to bottom?

First, I must say that there is no clear rubric, or instruction, in the tradition of the Church that dictates the order in which the candles that serve to enhance our service must or may be lit. There are indeed, different traditions in different places. Even so, as in all things related to our worship, reverence must always be the guiding principle. For this reason one should always be vested, or at the very least dressed appropriately for worship, when serving in the chancel, even for doing such seemingly simple tasks such as lighting the candles. T-shirts, tank tops, shorts, and sandals, etc., are entirely inappropriate for a server to perform any function during the Divine Worship.

Here at Redford we light the candles behind the altar beginning with the three candles on the right from outside to inside (or bottom to top), then the same is repeated for the three candles on the left. This is to signify the light of Christ coming into the sanctuary as our Lord makes His presence known among His people. The procedure for extinguishing the candles is just the opposite; inside to outside, first on the left and then the right. This is to signify the light of Christ now going out from the Church and into the world so that the Church can do what He has commanded: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”* (St. Matthew 28:19–20, KJV)

### Why is the Crucifix carried in procession?

The crucifix is a symbol, not an idol. It serves to remind us of the lengths to which our God has gone to free us from sin, Satan, and the grave. Indeed, somewhat like the Sacrament of the Altar, it aids our remembrance of Christ's sacrifice to save us. It is as St. Paul wrote in his first epistle to the Church in Corinth *“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”* (1 Corinthians 2:2, NKJV)

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this series on the Liturgy of the Church is found in *Why? A Layman's Guide to the Liturgy*, by Rev. Burnell F. Eckardt Jr., Repristination Press, (Malone, TX.), and first published in *Gottesdienst, The Journal of Lutheran Liturgy*, in a series by the same name between the years 1985-2005. Used by permission.

For this reason, when the processional crucifix is carried through the nave to its place in the sanctuary, it leads the way: for the choir, for the attendants, for the clergy, for the celebrant, and indeed, for all the people. While the congregants do not normally process (the exceptions are the Palm Sunday procession and the procession for the Great Vigil of Easter) they still, in agreement with St. Paul in both heart, mind, and spirit, join the procession which is led by the crucifix or cross.

So it is that the proper response of faith to the entrance of the crucifix in procession is to turn to face it as it passes one by, and to turn toward the altar after it passes. It is also proper (though not necessary) to bow one's head while making the sign of the cross as it passes as a gesture of humility toward the Crucified One who humbled Himself, being obedient to the point of death, even death upon the cross. (Philippians 2:8) At the close of the service it is also salutary to again show reverence and humility as the crucifix processes out of the nave, turning back to the altar after it has passed.

### **Why are torches sometimes carried in procession?**

The use of torches (i.e., candles on poles) in procession contributes to the beauty and ceremony of the procession. Normally, two torches are carried in procession behind the crucifix. They may also process with the Gospel at its reading and stand on either side of the Book as it is read. As lights on poles, they call to mind the words of Christ concerning light. In the Gospel of St. John our Lord says of Himself, *"I am the light of the world."* (St. John 9:5, NKJV) In the Gospel of St. Matthew He also tells His disciples, *"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* (St. Matthew 5:14–16, NKJV) The light of a Christian is in fact, the light of Christ shining brightly into the world. For this reason it is fitting that candles be used in worship.

**\*\*\* Soli Deo Gloria \*\*\***