



# Liturgical Thought

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

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### Why do the pastor and his assistants wear special vestments for worship?

Vestments are garments worn by the clergy and lay-assistants in the performance of their liturgical duties. In the Old Testament, God commanded particular vestments or garments to be worn by the priests in performance of their liturgical duties in the Tabernacle and later the Temple (Exodus 28:1, 39:4). Such commands were abrogated with the coming of the New Covenant Jesus has made with His New Testament Church. Still, the principle and traditions calling for clerical vestments led to the development and continuance of such vestments in Christian liberty for liturgical practice. In the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Lutherans chose to retain traditional liturgical vestments. While in many places such vestments for various non-theological reasons were abandoned, they still remain part of our Christian, and therefore Lutheran, heritage.

In addition to the continuance of our traditional Christian and Lutheran liturgical heritage, **vestments are worn for the primary purpose that they serve to cover the man.** They make him **liturgically neutral** if you will, in the sense that the pastor, while performing the liturgy, is **standing in for Christ**, that is, he is serving as **Christ's ambassador** to His people even as he serves as ambassador for the people to God. Vestments tend to **neutralize** any personal flashiness, or lack thereof, in the character of the man under the vestments. **He is hidden**, so to speak, in order that God's people in worship can see beyond the man to Christ who stands behind and in him. Think of the pastor as he performs his liturgical duties in service to God's people as a **living icon or picture of Christ**. For such he is as he announces the forgiveness of sins in absolution, reads and expounds on Holy Scripture, and especially as he serves Christ in the performance of the Service of the Sacrament of the Altar with the words, "*This is My Body, this is My Blood,*" etc.

Finally, vestments are worn for their beauty. That is, vestments are worn for the special character and beauty they add to our worship. When we come before our Lord in worship we, as far as is possible, wear our finest clothing in honor of the One before whom we stand. Is it not also fitting that we adorn our worship with the finest attire to set

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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.

worship apart from the day to day activities of this life? For worship is the center of Christian life and at the heart of our faith.

**✠ ✠ ✠ Soli Deo Gloria ✠ ✠ ✠**