



Liturgical Thought

EXPLANATION AND GUIDE TO THE LUTHERAN LITURGY¹

Why does the pastor wait to enter the chancel and approach the altar until the chanting of the Introit?

The word, “**Introit**” is from the Latin word, “**introitus**,” meaning “**entrance**,” or “**he enters**.” When the **Introit**, (usually composed of an **Antiphon**, **Psalm** verse or verses, the “**Gloria Patri**,” and the **Antiphon** repeated) is chanted or spoken it is literally the **beginning** of the Divine service. As was noted last week, the processional hymn and **Confiteor** (or **corporate confession and absolution**) which precede the **Introit**, are preparatory to the Divine Service, but in truth, are not actually part of the Divine Service itself.

The **Introit** is so named because it is here that the officiating pastor or **Celebrant** properly enters the **chancel**. As the **Celebrant** enters, the choir or Kantor chant the **Introit** as a sort of opening hymn or prayer. In many congregations the **Introit** is chanted or recited **antiphonally** (responsively) between Kantor, or choir, and the congregation. In places where there is no Kantor or Choir, or the choir does not sing every Sunday, the pastor/celebrant may chant the **Introit** himself as he enters the **chancel**.

The practice of chanting the **Introit** is similar in nature to ancient Israel’s practice of chanting the “**Psalms of Ascent**” (Psalms 120-135) as they mounted the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem. As for the New Testament Church, the **Introit** is a very early part of our worship liturgy having been introduced around the time of St. Augustine (ca. 400 A.D.), and consisted originally of an entire Psalm chanted **antiphonally**. The **Introit** is traditionally sung in plain-song settings.

The **Introit** sounds the key-note of the day. It is the herald’s voice announcing the great theme of the day’s worship. As a **proper**, the words of the **Introit** change every Sunday according to the season and day of the Church Year, and several Sundays of the Church calendar receive their name from the initial word or phrase of the Latin text of the **Introit** set aside for the day (e.g. the Sundays in Advent or Lent).

¹ 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.

The ***Introit*** ends with the “***Gloria Patri***” (Glory be to the Father, etc.) as we give praise for making entrance into the courts of the Triune God. That is to say, that with the ***Introit*** we enter into the courts of the Lord’s House and therefore, into God’s very presence.

During the ***Introit*** the pastor/celebrant makes the ***Sign of the Cross*** as he crosses the gate (entrance into the chancel at the chancel rail) and approaches the altar. It is entirely appropriate that the congregants follow the lead of the pastor and join him in the making of the ***Sign of the Cross***.

*** Soli Deo Gloria ***