



# Liturgical Thought

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

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### Sunday Worship

You may have wondered why we Christians worship on Sunday when the ancient Hebrews and Jews followed the traditional Sabbath and worshipped from sundown Friday evening until sundown Saturday evening. Actually, when the Church was very young Christians worshipped together daily. In the Book of the Acts of the Apostles chapter two, St. Luke writes: “**And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**” (Acts 2:41–42, NKJV) The fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers were worship.

Yet, even as they gathered together daily, they reserved Sunday as the weekly high feast, inasmuch as they recognized Sunday, the first day of the week, as the day when Christ arose triumphantly from the grave, leaving behind death and decay—both His and ours. Through His rest in the tomb from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, Jesus fulfilled the Law which required the Jews to rest from their labors and observe the Lord’s Sabbath with worship, prayers, and sacrifices. For this reason, the Apostle declares that Sabbaths of the Law are a shadow of things to come, but the substance of the Sabbath is always of Christ.

Therefore, Sunday became the Church’s “high” day of worship, since Christ Himself not only arose on Sunday, but made His subsequent resurrected appearances also on Sundays throughout the forty days leading to His ascension. Then came Pentecost and the bestowing of the Holy Spirit on the fiftieth day from Easter, also a Sunday.

So it was Christ Himself who shifted the thinking of His people toward Sunday as the chief of days. Moreover, since according to the Gospel of St. Luke, He was recognized by the Emmaus disciples (on Sunday) in the breaking of bread, and that phrase is repeated in Acts, so it was fitting that Sunday be also the chief day on which the Holy Sacrament was offered to the people.

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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.

It is for this reason that Holy Christendom, throughout the ages, whether or not they assembled also on other days of the week, would always assemble every Sunday to receive the Holy Sacrament in the Divine Worship.

Therefore the orders of Matins and Vespers, as well as other non-Communion services, were never really intended as replacements for the Divine Service on Sunday morning, but instead, were reserved for use on weekdays and as pre-sacramental services. Sunday was reserved for high worship, that is, for the reception of the Holy Supper.