

WAYS OF OPENING A SERVICE

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The Invocation

Most Lutheran orders use the Trinitarian invocation to open the divine service: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Some Lutherans regard the invocation sacrificially as a kind of prayer addressed to God. They therefore face the altar as they speak it. But our current usage indicates that we take it to function sacramentally as a performative utterance, a declaration to the congregation, since it is spoken by the pastor to the congregation. The pastor therefore says it facing the congregation with outstretched arms and makes the sign of the cross over it. It serves the following functions:

- It announces and proclaims the presence of the Triune God as the main actor and benefactor in the whole service.
- It authorises the baptised to use God's name to a gain access to him and his grace in the service.
- It places both the pastor and the congregation under the authority of the Triune God in the service.
- By it the pastor announces that he speaks and acts officially for the Triune God.

Whether the formula is understood sacrificially as a prayer or sacramentally as a declaration, it is not just meant to apply to the opening of the service. It governs the whole enactment of the service, since everything that happens in it is done in the presence and name of the Triune God.

Other Traditional Opening Pronouncements

The divine service and other minor services have also been opened with some other performative utterances. The following pronouncements have been used in our Lutheran tradition.

- The apostolic benediction (2 Cor. 13:14): "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all."
- The Trinitarian doxology (which may be preceded by some opening verses as in Matins and Vespers): "Glory to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forevermore (for ever)."
- The apostolic greeting (Rom. 1:7): "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ" or "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace".
- The greeting: "The peace of the Lord be with you (always)."

New Opening Pronouncements

- "God is with us here, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."
- "Holy, holy, holy, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Lord God Almighty), who was, and is, and is to come" (Rev. 4:8).

The Function of Opening Pronouncements

All of these opening pronouncements function as performative utterances. Like the benediction and the absolution, they do what they say. They proclaim the presence of the Triune God with the assembled congregation and give the faithful free access (the right of access/ the privilege of access/ full access/ the freedom of access) to God and his grace (gifts of grace/ his blessings) in the divine service. They may all be preceded by an appropriate scriptural sentence such as an invitation, a declaration, a promise, or a prayer.