

A Thanksgiving Festival of Scripture and Song

Worship and the Arts Subcommittee
Synod of Alberta and the Territories
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Here is a worship service featuring lessons, hymns, and prayers on the theme of thanksgiving. It is designed to be used in connection with the national holiday of Thanksgiving, surely a holiday that the church may embrace with all its heart. This Thanksgiving Festival could be used in a congregation, among a group of Lutheran congregations, or even as an ecumenical Thanksgiving service among neighboring congregations of various denominations.

The suggested hymns are chosen from the Lutheran Book of Worship and With One Voice. (If your congregation does not own With One Voice, the entire service can be sung from the Lutheran Book of Worship, as you will see.) The suggested prayers are chosen from the Lutheran Book of Worship, and its companion volume, the Minister's Desk Edition.

First, you will find the order of worship. Then you will find suggestions for enhancing the scripture readings, and ideas for varying the hymn singing and accompaniments.

A Thanksgiving Festival of Scripture and Song

Opening Hymn 557 "Let All Things Now Living"
or Hymn 543 "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

I. Genesis 1:1-2:3

Hymn 767 "All Things Bright and Beautiful"
or Hymn 561 "For the Beauty of the Earth"
Prayer (LBW, page 40, #156)

II. Psalm 104:1-25

Hymn 794 "Many and Great"
or Hymn 554 "This Is My Father's World"
Prayer (LBW, page 40, #155)

III. Psalm 104:25-37

Hymn 771 "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
or Hymn 409 "Praise and Thanksgiving"
Prayer (LBW Minister's Desk Edition, page 410, #382)

- IV. Deuteronomy 8:7-18
Hymn 362 "We Plow the Fields and Scatter"
or Hymn 760 "For the Fruit of All Creation"
Prayer (LBW, page 41, #157)
- V. Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
Hymn 407 "Come You Thankful People, Come"
Prayer (LBW, page 39, #150)
- VI. Luke 12:22-32
Hymn 476 "Have No Fear, Little Flock"
or Hymn 790 "Praise to You, O God of Mercy"
Prayer (LBW, page 47, #204)
- VII. Philippians 4:4-9
Hymn 797 "O God Beyond All Praising"
or Hymn 551 "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee"
Prayer (LBW Minister's Desk Edition, page 380-381, #343)

(Offering)

Benediction

Closing Hymn 533 or 534 "Now Thank We All Our God"

Suggestions for Enhancing the Scripture Readings

First Reading: Genesis 1:1-2:3

This is the first Creation Story in Genesis. It is very dramatic in its presentation. Over and over again we read, "Then God said..." This dramatic element can be enhanced by punctuating the reading, each time God speaks, with a single handbell sounding, or a tonal cluster, or if you do not have handbells, a cluster of small, high pitched randomly-tuned bells.

Second Reading: Psalm 104:1-25

This is a very expressive Psalm of thanksgiving and blessing. It could be read by TWO readers, one male and one female, with contrasting voice qualities. The reading should be very warm and expressive. The two readers shouldn't divide up the Psalm mechanically, by half verses or whole verses as we often do on Sunday mornings when we read the Psalm, but, by expressive blocks, e.g. I. vv.1-4; II. vv.5-9; I. vv.10-13; II. vv.14-17; I. vv.18-23; and Both vv.24-25.

Third Reading: Psalm 104:25-37

This is a continuation of the previous reading and may be read in the same style, only this time, perhaps the portions read by each voice might be a little shorter. Both vv.25-26; I. vv.27-28; II. vv.29-30; I. vv.31-32; II. vv.33-35; and Both: "Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!"

Fourth Reading: Deuteronomy 8:7-18

Here you might employ a single powerful male voice, to speak as the prophet, Moses. To highlight the proclamatory, prophetic nature of this text, you might include a brief trumpet fanfare before and after the reading. This fanfare could be simple, just a 4-6 note arpeggio--or the first line of the following hymn, either 362 or 760.

Fifth Reading: Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

These are parables of Jesus, and they appear to be very intimate parables, spoken to Jesus' disciples and close followers. You could use THREE voices here: Jesus, a narrator, and the slaves/disciples. (If you need a P.A. system, three mikes would be best for this; but if only one mike is available, simply slow the whole pace of the reading down to accommodate readers moving toward and away from the mike.) Note that the part of Jesus here need not be read by a male voice. Jesus is the Christ, who transcends our gender differences, and this is how he teaches us.

Sixth Reading: Luke 12:22-32

This reading is of the nature of personal consolation. It can be read in a warm, comforting manner, personal and intimate, by a single voice, either male or female.

Seventh Reading: Phillipians 4:4-9

To emphasize the epistolary nature of this reading, you might have the Lector sitting at a table, pen in hand, writing, and reading slowly what he "writes". If the table won't work, then the same effect can be obtained at a Lectern/Ambo. The idea here is that these were not first proclaimed words, but written words. For effect, use a large quill and scroll. Open the reading by saying, "A reading from the epistle of Paul to the Phillipians".

Ideas for Enriching the Music

The congregation is seldom asked to sing so many hymns at one sitting, unless perhaps at Christmas. The church musician's joyful task is to provide variety in the music however possible, always with a mind to serving the hymn texts. This will keep the songs, and the worship service, exciting and fresh. It is a celebration, after all, a party!

1. In choosing among the suggested hymns, or in substituting others, seek diligently to alternate loud hymns with soft hymns, fast hymns with slow hymns, hymns of proclamation with reflective hymns. Then, enjoy the differences! Let the fast ones really be fast, and the slow ones slow. In a more reflective hymn, like LBW 554 ("This Is My Father's World"), try a minimal accompaniment and let the voices carry the sound. In a massive hymn of thanksgiving, such as LBW 533 or 534 ("Now Thank We All Our God"), which is the closing hymn for this thanksgiving festival, how loudly can you do

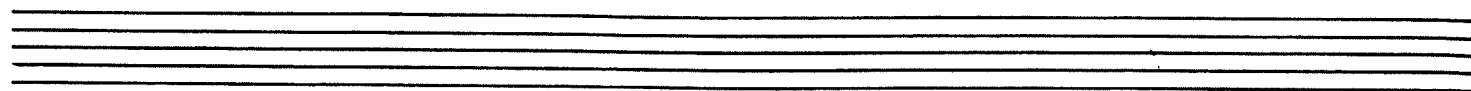
it, I wonder. Why not go for it? And while we're on the subject, how fast can you play and sing LBW 551 ("Joyful, Joyful")? Beethoven wrote the tune, and he marked it "allegro assai ♩ =80"! That's a surprisingly cheerful tempo--not very stately at all!

2. Use whatever instruments and sounds are available to you to vary the sound of the accompaniment. If you have an organ, one of the things that makes it "the King of Instruments" is all those different sounds; so experiment and try some novelty registrations as a change from your old stand-by sounds. If you have a piano, use that instead of the organ to accompany some of the hymns, perhaps LBW 476 ("Have No Fear, Little Flock"), which is German jazz, an unusual category! Use a guitar and piano together to accompany a folk tune, such as LBW 409 ("Praise and Thanksgiving"), or WOV 790 ("Praise To You, O God of Mercy"), and for both you will find guitar chords written over the music. A bass guitar would be a grand addition to the guitar and piano on those last songs, too, and think how happy the bass guitarist in your congregation would be to be asked! Simple is good. A single solo flute, recorder, violin or oboe could play once through the chorus of WOV 771 ("Great Is Thy Faithfulness") as an introduction to the congregational singing, and that would be a very moving event. A trumpet would thrill us all if the trumpeter were to play along with LBW 407 ("Come, Ye Thankful People, Come") and LBW 534 ("Now Thank We All Our God"). Trumpet music for those two is enclosed, and a trumpet descant for the last stanza as well.

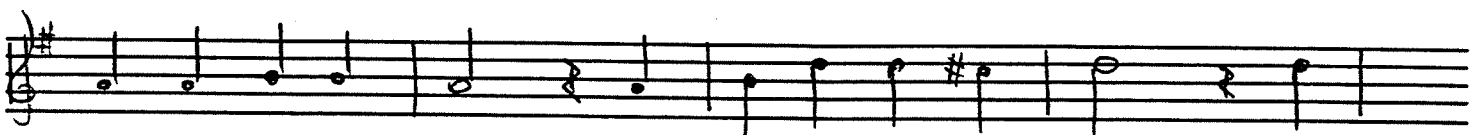
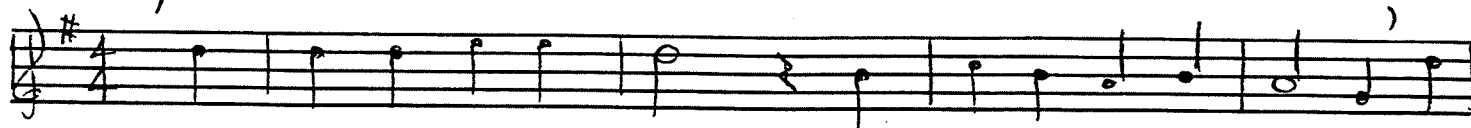
3. Vary the sound of the singing congregation. Have the men sing a stanza, or the women, or the children, or a soloist. Have the choir sing a stanza, perhaps in harmony a capella, or perhaps just in unison. The congregation can sing without accompaniment for a stanza, too, especially if you have a choir or at least a strong singer to lead the others. The choir can be used to sing a hymn which the congregation does not know, which introduces it to the congregation in a painless manner, and maybe in great style! The choir can also be used to sing an anthem or song that you have chosen to substitute for one of the hymns, if the text is appropriate to the preceding scripture reading.

4. Make a goal for yourself of surprising the congregation in the music, so that someone raises an eyebrow in pleasant surprise or nods to their neighbor in the pew with enthusiasm. It is some trouble to do so, granted; but the task is worthwhile because in decorating the hymn you underline the text, increase the congregation's awareness of the message, and augment their joy in singing it. Who knows? Maybe the congregation's enthusiastic singing will inspire you with joyful surprise!

submitted by
Rev. Don Nevile
and Ben DeVan



Melody



Descant (final stanza)

BSD

