

# The history of **WORSHIP**

*from Constantine to the Reformation*

**CHRISTIAN HISTORY GUIDE #2**



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**A SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCE  
FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF  
CHRISTIAN HISTORY**

# The landscape of medieval worship

	4th Century	8th Century	14th Century
Who leads worship in a local community?	Bishop of the city, assisted by presbyters (priests) and deacons. Women are not ordained to these roles in the West (the East ordains women as deaconesses) but participate in worship as readers and musicians.	Presbyters (priests), assisted by deacons, <b>subdeacons</b> , <sup>†</sup> and members of the minor orders in larger communities. Bishop or pope presides over the Eucharist if present. Women's leadership is limited to religious orders of nuns.	Similar to eighth century. Multiple Masses said by different priests may occur at the same time in the same church.
What are they wearing?	Tunic and chasuble (which resembles a poncho), similar to the everyday dress of Roman citizens; stole and other signs of priestly office begin to be used.	More extensive vestments including a chasuble for celebration of the Eucharist, an amice (a short cloak worn around the shoulders), a dalmatic (a long tunic, frequently worn by deacons), and a pallium, or cloak, for bishops and higher ranks.	Similar to eighth century, but with more ornamentation. Bishops and cardinals may wear special gloves and shoes, and bishops commonly wear miters.
How often does worship happen?	The Eucharist is offered every Sunday, and morning and evening prayer are said daily. The high holy days of the Lent-Easter-Pentecost and Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycles are celebrated with special services.	Similar to fourth century, although morning and evening prayer are said mostly in large cathedral churches and by religious orders. Feast days of saints begin to multiply in the church calendar.	Similar to eighth century, with an even greater multiplication of feast days and special observances. One of the most popular is Corpus Christi, which celebrates Christ's real presence in the Eucharist.
Who attends worship?	The faithful in any given city. <b>Catechumens</b> , <sup>†</sup> who are not yet baptized and thus cannot receive the Eucharist, are dismissed after the service of the Word to be instructed separately.	The faithful in any given city. <b>Catechumens</b> <sup>†</sup> are no longer dismissed.	The faithful in any given city. Many people come to Mass daily if offered, to witness the elevation of the Host.
What does the music sound like?	Unison singing, led by choirs and cantors. This is an area where women are allowed leadership. Instruments are viewed with suspicion due to their association with pagan worship.	A formalized type of chant, called "Gregorian chant" after Pope Gregory, who helped systematize and unify the church's body of music.	Chant is still used, but there is a much greater focus on <b>polyphonic</b> <sup>†</sup> music in which several voices are heard at once. Organs have entered worship and are used widely in larger churches.

Throughout this guide you will find both snapshots and surveys of the terrain of medieval worship. Here we pull them all together in a handy overview.

	4th Century	8th Century	14th Century
What Scriptures are read?	Readings from the Old Testament, Epistles, and Gospels. Psalms are sung at various points in the service.	An Epistle and Gospel passage are read—the Old Testament reading has dropped out. Psalms are sung at various points in the service. The Scriptures are read in Latin.	Similar to eighth century.
Who preaches, and what do they say?	The celebrant presiding over the service normally preaches. Preaching is highly vivid, allegorical, and rhetorical.	The celebrant preaches. Transition from preaching in Latin to preaching in the vernacular occurs around this time. A more exegetical preaching style has developed, along with standard lectionaries of Scripture readings.	The celebrant preaches in the vernacular if he is literate. Mendicant (“begging”) orders such as the Franciscans are known for their preaching and often hold special services. Some priests hold a special preaching service called <b>prone</b> <sup>†</sup> with a vernacular sermon before Mass on Sunday.
What creed is said?	Creedal formulas, some of which later develop into the Apostles’ Creed, are used at baptisms.	The Nicene Creed begins to be used after the sermon around this time. The Apostles’ Creed is used for baptisms.	The Nicene Creed is used after the sermon. The Apostles’ Creed is used for baptisms.
What is included in the Eucharistic prayer?	At minimum, a remembrance of salvation history ( <b>anamnesis</b> <sup>†</sup> ) and a request for the presence of the Holy Spirit ( <b>epiclesis</b> <sup>†</sup> ). Earlier prayers were often improvised, but by now they are coalescing into various families of prayers used in different locations.	In addition to the <b>anamnesis</b> <sup>†</sup> and <b>epiclesis</b> <sup>†</sup> , a number of other parts are included (see “Saying grace,” p. 19). Standardization has occurred, which replaces many geographical variations with the liturgical usage of Rome.	“Roman Canon” now firmly established as standard. Much of the prayer is said silently, with a special focus on the Words of Institution (“This is my body . . .” “This is my blood . . .”) as its heart.
Who receives the Eucharist?	All who are baptized. <b>Catechumens</b> <sup>†</sup> preparing for baptism do not receive.	All who are baptized. Most people receive infrequently and then only after preparing themselves with serious fasting and prayer.	Similar to eighth century. By now, most people receive only once a year, on Easter, unless they are especially devout. Receiving the Eucharist must be preceded by confession.



# A worshipful quiz & glossary

MEDIEVAL WORSHIP used terms unfamiliar to some Christians today, though some of these are still in use in many traditions. How many of the following words can you match with their descriptions? As a

bonus, once you've filled out the right answers below (you can find them on p. 49), you'll have a small glossary for this guidebook. Throughout the guide, you'll find **boldfaced** terms with a small cross; these refer you back to this quiz.

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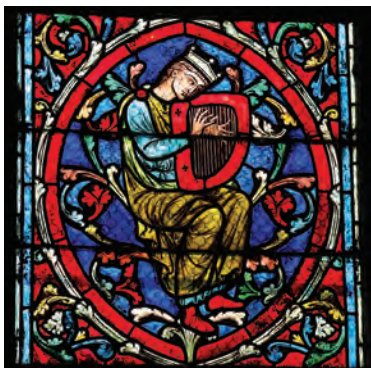
## WORD BANK

Anamnesis | Antiphon | Apse | Catechumens | Chancel  
| Epiclesis | Fistula | Gloria Patri | Kyrie eleison | Nave | Ordinary | Polyphony  
| Porters [doorkeepers], lectors [readers], exorcists, and acolytes | Pater noster  
| Pax board | Postils | Prone | Propers | Reredos | Rood screens | Sacristy  
| Secular priests | Subdeacons/subdiaconate

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The semicircular area at one end of a Roman basilica, where the bishop and presbyters sat for Christian worship
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The long narrow space in a basilica where people gathered for worship
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The back wall behind the main altar, often carved and painted
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. A longer version of the apse, which developed in the medieval era and where monks and clergy often sat in choir stalls
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Short refrain usually sung before or after a Scripture reading or psalm
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Music in which more than one part is sung at a time
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Unchanging portion of the Mass text
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Texts of the Mass that change according to the day or season
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. "Deacons in training," an order of ministry seen as a stepping-stone to the diaconate and priesthood
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. "Minor orders" of worship leadership limited to specific liturgical functions
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Those in the early church who had expressed a desire to be baptized but were undergoing the lengthy period of preparation for joining the church and could not participate in the Eucharist
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. A small room near the front of the church where preparations for worship are made
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. The service text that begins "Glory be to the Father"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. The service text that begins "Lord have mercy"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. The Lord's Prayer, and one of the texts that congregants were likely to know by heart in Latin
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Straw by which consecrated wine was received from the chalice
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Priests who were not members of a religious order
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. A word that can be translated "remembrance"; the portion of the Eucharistic prayer that includes a recital of God's mighty acts throughout salvation history
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. A word that can be translated "invocation"; the portion of the Eucharistic prayer that asks the Holy Spirit to descend on the elements and on the worshiping community
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Collections of sample sermons to help preachers
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. A vernacular preaching service observed before celebration of the Sunday Mass in an effort to better catechize people, including parts of the liturgy people would be sure to know such as the Lord's Prayer and the "Hail Mary," as well as a prayer of confession and a sermon
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. Elaborately carved wooden barriers in medieval churches, solid from the waist down and full of open arches from the waist up, with images from the Bible and the lives of saints carved on them, and a giant crucifix in the middle
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. A board held between congregants during the kiss of peace to prevent actual kissing





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## A note from the PROJECT WRITER



In 1993, *Christian History* published issue no. 37 dedicated to the theme of *Worship in the Early Church*. At the time, associate editor Mark Galli commented that when *CH* polled its readers as to what themes they most wanted to read about, worship in the first few Christian centuries “topped the charts.”

Issue 37 remains one of *CH*’s most requested, and for good reason: It admirably sketches where the early Christians worshiped, how they prayed and sang, what they borrowed (and did not borrow) from the worship practices of their pagan neighbors, and how they baptized (with “high drama”) and celebrated the Eucharist (frequently and fervently). In it you can read the words of many

of those early Christians—among them Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Hippolytus, Cyril, Perpetua, Clement of Alexandria, and the unknown authors of Christianity’s earliest known church order, the *Didache*—describing the ways in which Christ’s presence was made real to them in the worshipping community and sustained them in the face of persecution and martyrdom.

Their prayers and hymns echo through the centuries, not least this early Easter hymn:

“Christ is risen: The world below is in ruins. Christ is risen: The spirits of evil are fallen. Christ is risen: The angels of God are rejoicing. Christ is risen: The tombs are void of their dead. Christ has indeed arisen from the dead, the first of the sleepers. Glory and power are his forever and ever. Amen.”



### THE LORD’S SACRAMENTS.

*Above left:* Christ’s baptism. *Above:* His institution of the Eucharist (early 15th-c., Sassetta).

Also with good reason, issue 37 concludes with the legalization of Christianity in the early fourth century. But Christians did not cease worshipping “in spirit and in truth” when their faith was legalized, only to begin again in the Reformation, in the eighteenth century, or even in the present. We do a disservice to so many in our own Christian family tree when we pass lightly over more than a thousand years of their prayers, songs, processions, sermons, statues, mosaics, baptisms, and Eucharistic celebrations. During the millennium and more between Constantine and Luther, Christianity moved from the margins to the center, becoming the church of the powerful as well as the powerless. It rose with stunning rapidity to become the dominant faith in the landscape of old Rome and emerging Europe. Yet Christianity never stopped trying to come to terms with its earthly power, nor seeking out new ways to worship Christ, who had called it into being.

In this guide to Christian worship from the fourth to the fifteenth century, *CH* travels through those years to discover exactly what Christians were up to as they met on Sundays, on feast days, and for daily prayer. What did preachers preach about? What Scriptures were read? What did choirs and congregations sing? Who led worship in the front of the assembly? In fact, where was the assembly worshipping in the first place, and what did the buildings look like? How did services vary from place to place,

## **“PREACH THE GOSPEL ALWAYS.”**

Preaching never stopped being crucial to the church. The preaching of Bishop Ambrose of Milan turned Augustine to Christ.



and what parts of the service never varied? What did people think a sacrament was, and how many of them were there? Who took Holy Communion, and when? You will hear saints of the church from Augustine to Francis of Assisi, Ambrose to Bernard of Clairvaux and Benedict of Nursia, John Chrysostom to Peter Lombard, reflect on who Christ is and how we best worship him. You will read a nun’s diary, walk through worship with a pope, and stand in the back of an English church in the shifting light and shadow filtering through Gothic windows.

This guide will take you through this wealth of material in two ways. First, there are five topical articles on words, sacraments, worship leadership, church music, and church architecture from 400 to 1400. Read these to gain an overview of what worship looked like—what stayed the same, what changed, and why.

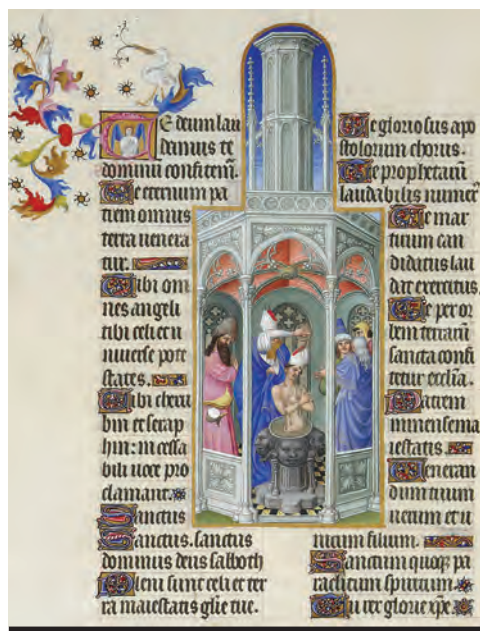


Three “snapshots” are interspersed among these: Jerusalem in the fourth century, Rome in the eighth century, and England in the fifteenth century. These will help you see how Christians worshiped at some specific moments along this journey. The articles in this guide focus on worship in Western Christendom as the empire begins to divide. Future guides may look at Eastern and post-Reformation worship.

Read on and learn with Christians of the Early, High, and Late Middle Ages to sing: “Christ is risen: The world below is in ruins. Christ is risen: The spirits



of evil are fallen. Christ is risen: The angels of God are rejoicing. Christ is risen: The tombs are void of their dead. Christ has indeed arisen from the dead, the first of the sleepers. Glory and power are his forever and ever. Amen.”



**HONORING THE SAINTS.** Above right: In St.-Etienne-du-Mont Church, Paris, the **rood screen**<sup>†</sup> separates the nave from the altar, behind which scientist-theologian Blaise Pascal is buried. Above: This early 15th-c. “book of hours” (prayerbook) depicts the baptism of Augustine.

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## A note from the MANAGING EDITOR



This year at *Christian History* promises to be a lively one, with issues coming on Christianity in America, early Africa, and the modern industrial West, as well as a special Christmas project.

Now, a *very important matter*: If you want to continue to receive *CH*, look at the blue box on the back of this issue. If it contains a subscriber number, then good—you need not do anything further to keep receiving *CH*. If it does not, then you need to sign up by phone at 1-800-468-0458, or by email at [info@christianhistorymagazine.org](mailto:info@christianhistorymagazine.org), or by registering at [www.christianhistorymagazine.org](http://www.christianhistorymagazine.org).

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A final note: We know that over 40 percent of readers use *CH* in teaching. If you know of a college, seminary, school, or church whose faculty or staff would enjoy *CH*, we can set up a bulk subscription of any size, at a low per-copy rate, paid either by the institution or by a donor. Email [info@christianhistorymagazine.org](mailto:info@christianhistorymagazine.org) or call 1-800-468-0458.

P.S. Note the ► symbols at the end of several articles in this guide. These refer to bonus video clips related to the article content. To view the clips, simply open the online version of this guide at [www.ChristianHistoryMagazine.org](http://www.ChristianHistoryMagazine.org) and click the ► button at the end of those articles. Video content is from Christian History Institute's DVD series "The History of Christian Worship."

### " . . . IF NECESSARY, USE WORDS."

Above: Elaborately carved scenes from Jesus' life decorate this 14th-c. Italian pulpit. Right: In the 13th-c. preaching revival, friars like San Bernardino drew huge city crowds.





# Worship in the newly legalized church

IT WAS THE LATE FOURTH century, and a nun was riding along the dusty, dangerous road—almost 2,500 miles of it—from Galicia in northwest Spain to the far-off Holy Land. She was fulfilling a dream: to see for herself the places where her Lord had lived, the roads he had walked, and the tomb where he was buried and rose again. Her name was Egeria.

She made it there, and home again, and in between spent three years journeying around the

eastern Mediterranean, visiting all the major cities and holy sites. And most fortunately for us, Egeria kept a diary during her travels. She might have created this record to store up the precious memories of the trip for herself, or it might have been a way to share her journey with her sister nuns back home. Either way, this diary provides a vivid picture of daily worship and the celebration of the high holy days of Holy Week in the newly legalized and prosperous church in one of the major cities of the empire.





## Daily, hourly praise

In Egeria's day, the office—the daily round of prayer that would eventually move behind the doors of monasteries and convents—was still very much daily *public* prayer. She reports at length the services at the traditional place of the Resurrection (called the Anastasis), beginning with early morning worship by the local monks and virgins “and also some lay men and women, especially those who were willing to wake at such an early hour.” Every day certain presbyters and deacons from the city's clergy participated as well. They joined “in singing the refrains to the psalms, hymns, and **antiphons**” until daybreak, with the clergy

## “NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!”

When the 4th-c. nun Egeria finally got to take her much-desired pilgrimage to Jerusalem, she experienced worship in the land at the very center of the Christian imagination. Her diary of the experience yields precious details of early Constantinian worship. (Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.)

praying between each hymn. With dawn came more clergy, including the bishop: “He goes straight into the cave, and inside the screen he first says the Prayer for All (mentioning any names he wishes) and blesses the **catechumens**<sup>†</sup> and then another prayer and blesses the faithful. Then he comes outside the screen and everyone comes up to kiss his hand.”

All of this repeated at noon and at three o'clock. At four o'clock, the service also included the lighting of lamps: “The fire is brought not from outside, but from the cave—inside the screen—where a lamp is kept burning night and day.” The usual singing and praying commenced. After the service a procession was made from the tomb to Golgotha, where the bishop repeated a ritual both in front of and behind a cross that stood on the reputed site of the Crucifixion. At each place, the baptized as well as the **catechumens**<sup>†</sup> approached and kissed his hand. There amid the shimmering glow of “great glass lanterns” and a myriad of candles, he blessed each of them in turn. As the last believers came for their blessings, dusk was darkening into night.

**HANDS RAISED: NOT JUST FOR MODERN CHARISMATICS.** The early Christians often prayed while standing with arms outstretched, as this 3rd-c. fresco shows. (Catacombs of Priscilla, Rome, Italy.)



## “The whole assembly groans over all the Lord underwent”

Egeria also describes the more elaborate worship at the Anastasis basilica on Sunday mornings. Before dawn people began to gather outside the tomb. They sat “waiting there singing hymns and **antiphons**,<sup>†</sup> and they have prayers between, since there are always presbyters and deacons there ready for the vigil.” At sunrise, the bishop began the service. All stood to sing three psalms, and after the clergy offered prayers, they incensed the entire worship space “so that the whole basilica is filled with the smell.” Then the bishop took up the Gospel book and read aloud the story of the Resurrection to a heartfelt accompaniment: “At the beginning of the reading the whole assembly groans and laments over all

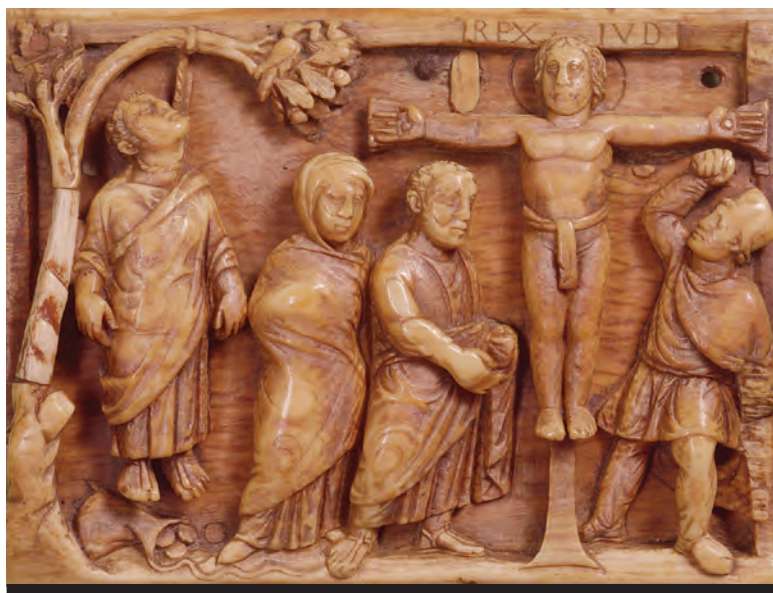
that the Lord underwent for us, and the way that they weep would move even the hardest heart to tears.”

Although some then—as now—went home to sleep after this early-morning service, the worship did not end: now it moved to the great basilica built by Constantine over the traditional site of Golgotha. From dawn until about 10 in the morning, many of the presbyters preached sermons. Then “the monks escort the bishop with hymns from the Great Church to the sanctuary [at the Anastasis]. And when the bishop arrives with hymns, all the doors of the sanctuary basilica are opened, and all the people enter (that is, the faithful; for the **catechumens**<sup>†</sup> enter not).” The baptized Christians took the Eucharist together and then departed.

Egeria's diary also gives us a dramatic account of how Easter was celebrated, as well as an explanation of how those **catechumens**,<sup>†</sup> who had spent up to three years learning about their new-found faith, prepared for baptism and full inclusion into the Christian faith. At the beginning of Lent, one of the presbyters put forward the names of those among the **catechumens**<sup>†</sup> who he felt were ready for the sacrament. Each candidate then came to be examined by the bishop seated in his chair in the Great Church: "As they come in one by one, the bishop asks their neighbors questions about them: 'Is this person leading a good life?'" If he was satisfied with the answers, the bishop approved them.

## From exorcism to the Easter vigil

On Palm Sunday, the beginning of "The Great Week," the bishop and all the people processed down the Mount of Olives "with psalms and **antiphons**,<sup>†</sup> all the time repeating 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.'" The daily round of prayer services included readings about the events of the Passion. On Wednesday "a presbyter . . . reads the passage about Judas Iscariot going to the Jews and fixing what they must pay him to betray the Lord. The people groan and lament at this reading." On Holy Thursday participants received the Eucharist at the traditional place of Jesus' ascension, and then in a singing procession took the bishop to Gethsemane. On Friday the bishop



**IT'S ALL ABOUT CHRIST'S PASSION.** This Roman ivory carving is the oldest known illustration of Christ on the cross (400–420 A.D.). It was probably made as a panel for a box intended for Communion bread. Notice Judas at left.





was seated in a chair at Golgotha and deacons brought him a box containing “the holy wood of the cross,” which all the people—**catechumens**<sup>†</sup> included—came up to and kissed.

Unfortunately, Egeria was not so detailed about the Easter vigil itself, saying only, “On Saturday . . . they keep their paschal vigil like us.” From other sources, however, chiefly postbaptismal homilies by Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 387), John Chrysostom (d. 407), and Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) in the East and Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) in the West, we have a fairly good picture of what she might have witnessed, at least as far as the baptisms went.

## Naked as the day they were (re-)born

First the candidates, in strong language, renounced sin and Satan. This was quite possibly done outside the baptistery itself and facing westward—away from Eden and therefore toward the devil, for as Cyril wrote, “When you renounce Satan you trample underfoot your entire covenant with him and abrogate your former treaty with Hell. The gates of God’s paradise are open to you, that garden which God planted in the east.”

The candidates then, in allegiance to Christ, submitted to be stripped—candidates were baptized naked in areas separated by sex, as



**BREAD AND WATER.** *Left:* Bread united believers to Christ, echoing the loaves of Jesus' miracle. (5th c.) *Above:* Water ushered converts into the church. (3rd-c. Roman baptism.) *Below:* In the basilica, the baptized were welcomed to the Eucharist. (5th-c. mosaic)

a fitting symbol of new birth—and were anointed with oil. They were then either totally immersed in the font or had copious amounts of water poured on them. Homilists regularly associated the act of being baptized with dying and rising with Christ and thus gaining the salvation his death and Resurrection had won, as Cyril said, “In his case all these events really occurred, but in your case there was a likeness of death and suffering, but the reality, not the likeness, of salvation.” The baptized then received new white garments

and the kiss of peace. Now for the first time, they could join the community in the Eucharist, as they had been unable to do throughout all the years of their catechumenate.

Of course Egeria is describing an elaborately planned and executed worship service carried out at Christianity's chief pilgrimage spot. But many of these details were echoed, in smaller and less ornate ways, wherever fourth-century Christians worshipped. We see in her story how foundational the bishop







was, not only to church government and discipline, but also to the assembly at worship. We see, at the center and cornerstone of that worship, the Eucharist, celebrated weekly and in many places more frequently than that, surrounded by many songs and prayers.

## The “stuff” of early worship

We see the importance of material objects—the wood of the cross, the Gospel book, the lamps, the oil—and sacred places. We see the shape of the Christian year—which actually had two major “hinges,” though Egeria only describes the Lent-Easter

**“THIS IS MY BODY.”** This agape meal from a 3rd-c. Roman tomb bespeaks both fellowship and Eucharist.



cycle. (The other was the commemoration both of Christ’s birth and of his anticipated Second Coming remembered through the cycle of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany.) And, finally, we see the careful separation of baptized believers from those preparing to join the community. The *catechumens*<sup>†</sup> could stay to hear the preaching, praying, and singing, but they were ushered out before the Eucharist to have the Scriptures and the history and



TOP: PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM DALLIS  
BOTTOM: ©THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM



theology of Christianity explained to them, and to fast and pray in preparation for the life-changing sacrament they would later undergo.

We don't know how Egeria's sisters reacted to her travel diary. Were they amazed? Moved? Surprised? Did they make changes in their own worship practices? However her sisters responded, this fourth-century monastic pilgrim has left to us, her twenty-first-century sisters and brothers, a great gift. Her account has become for us a window into the worship of those who lived in those first generations of Christianity's legalization in the empire. Through Egeria we can almost hear and see our fourth-century compatriots as they sing, pray, breathe in the incense, kiss the cross, feel the baptismal waters wash over them, and emerge from those waters in gratitude to meet the mysteries of the Holy Meal.  

**"I SURRENDER ALL."** This late 4th-c. sarcophagus again shows the typical early Christian prayer posture.



**THE BODY OF CHRIST AT WORSHIP.** This tableau on the wall of a 4th-c. Roman villa represents the exuberance and color of early Christian worship. Note the cross on each worshiper's garment.





# Did worship still feature the Word?

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, we hear many sermons preached for the conversion of unbelievers—Paul informing the Athenians that in God we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28) or telling his conversion story to Festus and Agrippa and arguing further “that Christ would suffer, and that He should be the first who would rise from the dead” even as Festus protested that he was insane (Acts 26). But there is much less biblical evidence of what the earliest Christians said and read in their worship as gathered com-

munities—although we do know (Acts 20:7–9) that Paul preached until midnight so that Eutychus fell asleep and out the window!

Synagogue worship featured readings of the law and prophets, and commentary on them, and from the mid-second century there is evidence that Christians were doing the same sort of thing. Portions of the New Testament—Paul’s letters, for instance—obviously were intended to be read aloud, and from the second century on we know that the Hebrew Scriptures were read as well.

## ESCAPISTS OR EVANGELISTS?

The preaching “monk” in this image from “Sermons sur la Passion et Traites Divers” by Jean de Gerson (1363–1429) is likely a friar.

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## The Golden Mouth and the Great Rhetorician of Hippo

After the legalization of Christianity, the church entered into one of its golden ages of preaching. Supposedly, preachers began to use the pulpit when “Golden Mouthed” John Chrysostom (347–407) decided he would rather not preach seated in the bishop’s chair (see “What did the worship space look like?” p. 44). Converts such as Augustine of Hippo (354–430) had been trained in the great rhetorical schools of their day—Augustine had indeed been a teacher of rhetoric—and Christians in general expected the same high level of rhetorical skill from their spiritual leaders that they heard from their imperial leaders.

To hold up their end of this effort, bishops and presiders turned to an ever-increasing collection of biblical commentaries in their preaching and Bible study. By the fourth century, lectionaries prescribing readings for the days and seasons of the Christian year were in use throughout the empire. The sixth century birthed a standard lectionary in Rome for Sundays and feast days that would remain central in Roman Catholicism until a new one was introduced in the twentieth century. Liturgical scholar James White writes, “Even pagans came to hear the service of the word and Augustine himself was converted largely through the eloquence of Ambrose’s preaching.”

## What you didn’t know about preaching in the Middle Ages

A modern stereotype insists little preaching and Scripture reading went on in the churches of the later Middle Ages, but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, as preachers of the Middle Ages worked their way through their widely available and fairly standardized Scripture lectionaries, they developed a new style of preaching—familiar to modern ears—that was less allegorical than that of the church fathers and focused more specifically on close readings of the assigned texts for the day. Then as now, preachers had books of sermon illustrations—usually from the lives of the saints—and collections of sample sermons called **postils**<sup>†</sup> to help them out. The rise of the mendicant, or begging, orders in the thirteenth century (Franciscan and Dominican friars) led to one of many medieval revivals in preaching. One of the chief tasks of these wandering orders was to preach—indeed, for the Franciscans in particular, to preach in such a way as to arouse the emotions of their listeners—and they often built churches designed specifically for this purpose.

Meanwhile, the service of the Word—the first part of worship, which focuses on Scripture and preaching before moving into the service of the Table (offering and Eucharist)—was growing ever longer and more elaborate. Early sources testify that it consisted mainly of Scripture lessons, psalms, sermons, and prayers.





## The Word sung and preached to the people

But later centuries added to this part of the service more and more introductory material, including an introit (service-opening hymn or psalm) and musical settings of the scriptural phrases *Kyrie eleison*<sup>†</sup> (“Lord have mercy”) and *Gloria in excelsis* (“Glory to God in the highest”). Much of this was designed as “traveling music” to get everyone in place to begin worship. White notes, “Acts performed in silence, no matter how essential, always seem to invite verbal or choral accompaniment as if we never quite trust simple action.”

The rest of the service grew as well. Psalm-singing became a longer and more elaborate part of the service, and while creedal statements had long been used in the baptismal liturgy, the Nicene Creed came into regular use after the Sunday sermon sometime in the eighth century. In

### THE GLORY OF THE WORD.

The beautiful Pisano Pulpit in Siena Cathedral, Italy, shows how the late medieval church valued preaching.

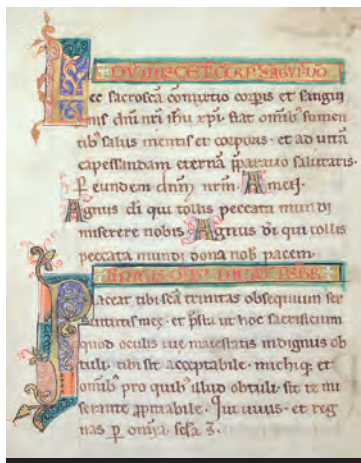
addition, near the end of the Middle Ages, some priests began to add a vernacular preaching service called “prone.” This effort to better catechize the people was observed before the celebration of the Sunday Mass. It included parts of the liturgy people would be sure to know such as the Lord’s Prayer and the Hail Mary (adapted from two verses in Luke: the angel’s greeting to Mary in 1:28 and Elizabeth’s greeting to her in 1:42), as well as a prayer of confession and a sermon. Later, this service would influence the Reformers as they developed preaching-focused services—although, since pews were coming into vogue by the fifteenth century, the listeners were no longer in danger of falling out the window. 📺 ▶



# Saying grace

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYERS varied widely throughout the empire in the early days of the church. The *Apostolic Tradition* (most likely fourth century, not third as sometimes thought) gives a standard form, although it is intended as a model, not a command. By the end of the fourth century, the prayer was assumed to include certain standard parts:

- the *Sursum corda*, or opening dialogue (“The Lord be with you/ And with your spirit/ Lift up your hearts/ We lift them up to the Lord/ Let us give thanks to the Lord/ It is right to give him thanks and praise.”)
- the Preface, which contains words appropriate to the day or season
- the *Sanctus* (“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts; Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”), with appropriate material before and after it
- the Institution Narrative, giving the story of Christ’s institution of the Eucharist in words drawn from the Scripture passages in the Gospels and I Corinthians 11
- the *Anamnesis*,<sup>†</sup> which can be translated “remembrance” and includes a recital of God’s mighty acts throughout salvation history
- the Offering of the bread and wine
- the *Epiclesis*<sup>†</sup> (“invocation”), which asks the Holy Spirit to descend on the elements and on the worshipping community



## PRAY BEFORE PARTAKING.

These prayers from an 11th-c. “sacramentary” are to be spoken during preparation for Eucharist.

- Intercessions for the world and the church
- the Doxology

In the fourth through sixth centuries, Eucharistic prayers, while not departing too far from this outline, began to take unique forms in certain geographical locations. Liturgical scholars divide them into “families”: North African, Alexandrian (Egyptian), West and East Syrian, Byzantine, Roman (later the standard for the entire Western church), Ambrosian (centered on Milan), Mozarabic (centered on Spain), Celtic, and Gallican (centered on France and Germany). By the eighth century, the Roman prayer, usually called the “Roman Canon,” took on a form close to the one still in use today. ☩



# What sorts of music did worshipers use?

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS FACED a musical dilemma. They were surrounded by pagan spectacles featuring lavish choral singing, instrumental music, and dancing, and these were often associated with lust-provoking drama (performed in the nude) and the notorious Roman blood combat. For obvious reasons, the North

African teacher Tertullian (c. 160–c. 220) argued that Christian converts should shun the “shows” that had once given them such pleasure. And besides, all such entertainments were dedicated to pagan gods—or as Tertullian put it in typically blunt fashion, demons. To indulge in such events was inconsistent with a Christian’s



**THE DEVIL'S MUSIC.** Above: Because of their associations with decadent pagan festivals, musical instruments were only gradually allowed into Christian worship. (Harpist: 13th-c., Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris.)

**VOICES FROM THE PAST.** Left: From chant to **polyphony**,<sup>†</sup> singing echoed through the thousand years of medieval worship.

baptismal vow to eschew all things belonging to the devil.

The bad taste left in early Christians' mouths by such corrupt amusements in turn created controversy over worship music: Large choruses, instruments, and elaborate musical settings seemed too much like the old "shows" of the coliseums. As music historian Donald Grout writes, "Until the feeling of pleasure attached to these kinds of music could be somehow transferred from the theater and the marketplace to the church, they were distrusted." Even the use of the psalms was controversial, since

they contain references to some musical instruments—psaltery and harp, for example—forbidden in Christian worship.

## From unison chanting to choirs and cantors

Instead, as far as scholars can reconstruct, early Christians either sang in unison or offered extemporaneous solos as their musical forms of worship. The same Tertullian writes that during the agape meal, "each is urged to come into the middle and sing to God, either from sacred scriptures or from his own invention." In

addition to the psalms, which despite their questionable content were chanted in worship just as they had been in the Jewish tradition, the early Christians sang hymns and **antiphons**<sup>†</sup> (short refrains) at both daily public prayer and at the Eucharist. As the fourth-century nun Egeria notes (see “Worship in the newly legalized church,” p. 8), these songs were always “appropriate to the place and the day.”

After the legalization of Christianity, a more formal attempt was made to appoint choirs and cantors to lead congregational singing. These roles were open to women, who served both as cantors and in “choirs of virgins,” though this, too, caused controversy since women were notoriously prominent in pagan worship ceremonies. Boy choirs were used as well; the *Testamentum Domini* (5th c.) refers to “the virgins alternating with the boys responding to the one who sings the psalms in the church.”

## Let’s enjoy the singing . . . but not *too* much

Augustine (354–430) helped to formulate more definitive thoughts about church music, as he did about so much else, in his treatise *On Music* (387). In his commentary on the psalms, he defines a hymn as “a song containing praise of God. If you praise God, but without song, you do not have a hymn. If you praise anything which does not pertain to the glory of God, even if you sing it, you do not have a hymn. Hence a hymn contains the three elements: song and praise of God.”



**SAINT OF SONG.** Pope Gregory the Great (540–604; shown dictating) is patron saint of musicians and singers.

Yet despite his obvious admiration for sacred song, a little of the old fear of the pleasures of music lingered with Augustine. He writes in his autobiographical *Confessions*: “When I call to mind the tears I shed at the songs of Thy church, at the outset of my recovered faith, and how even now I am moved not by the singing but by what is sung, when they are sung with a clear and skillfully modulated voice, I then acknowledge the great utility of this custom. . . . Yet when it happens to me to be more moved by the singing than by what is sung, I confess myself to have sinned criminally, and then I would rather not have heard the singing.”

But the real father of Western church music was Ambrose (c. 340–397), the bishop of Milan who was so instrumental in Augustine’s own conversion. Eastern Christians were already singing hymns in their worship, but when Ambrose became bishop in the late fourth century, he introduced





**SOUND THE HARP.** By the time of this image of David (1340), instruments were accepted in worship.

these kinds of songs to the church in Milan. In fact, he composed the texts to many of these himself, including “O Splendor of God’s Glory Bright.” He writes, “They say that the people are led astray by the charms of my hymns. Certainly, I do not deny it. This is a mighty charm, more powerful than any other. For what avails more than the confession of the Trinity, which is proclaimed daily in the mouth of all the people?”

These hymns, and the other music sung in worship, were chanted, with one melodic line

that rose and fell in an attempt to follow the natural pitch of the human voice. Chanting developed out of a form of synagogue speech called cantillation that attempted to heighten speech for dramatic effect. Although we often hear the term “Gregorian Chant,” Pope Gregory the Great (540–604, pope 590–604) did not invent Western chant, let alone compose all the music used by the Western church as later legends insist (some icons picture the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove dictating the melodies to him). However, Gregory was a great systematizer, wanting the whole church to use the same liturgy and music for worship. To that end, he began a movement to

absorb existing Western liturgies and musical traditions (Mozarabic, Gallican, Ambrosian, and Celtic) into the liturgy of Rome, an effort that was largely successful.

Unison chanting ruled the day until the Late Middle Ages, when some churches introduced **polyphony**<sup>†</sup>—music in which more than one part is sung at a time. Because much of polyphonic church music was based on secular tunes, it carried its share of controversy. This, coupled with the fact that people often had difficulty understanding the words, meant that polyphonic music was slow to catch on.

Much of what we associate with church music today did not

become part of medieval music until the later Middle Ages. Chant only began to be regularly notated (written down on paper) in the ninth century, and organs appeared around the eleventh century but were not regularly used to accompany liturgical singing until the thirteenth. Other instruments were sometimes used, but not approved of—we know this because rules began to appear against using them.

## Chanting the hours

The lion's share of singing in the medieval church went on in monasteries and convents, where the monks and nuns chanted psalms as they moved through their daily

schedule of services, called the divine office: matins ("morning"), lauds ("praises"), prime ("first hour"), terce ("third hour"), sext ("sixth hour"), none ("ninth hour"), vespers ("evening"), and compline ("completion"). Ideally this schedule would begin before dawn and continue about every three hours until sundown; Mass would also be celebrated each day. All 150 psalms were chanted through every week, each with its own **antiphon**.<sup>†</sup> Hymns were also sung at each office and at



**CHOIRS OF ANGELS.** As it does today, song connected earth to heaven in medieval services. (A Milan psalter, 1515.)

Mass, and the Scripture readings were chanted. All of this was in Latin, although some countries



(Poland was one) developed a tradition of vernacular hymns as well, which were, as James White puts it, something “in which layfolk might engage themselves while the priest went about his business at the altar-table.”

Originally, the **ordinary**,<sup>†</sup> or unvarying, texts of the Mass were set to simple tunes that everyone could sing, while the **proper**,<sup>†</sup> or seasonally changing, texts (Scriptures and prayers for the day, for instance) were sung by trained singers. Eventually almost all the music for the Mass and the office became too difficult for any but trained musicians in monasteries and cathedrals. Despite this shift

**MELODIOUS MONKS.** Singing was woven into the rhythm of each monastic day. (*Luttrell Psalter*, c. 1325.)

away from congregational song, theologians still maintained the importance of music in fostering lay devotion; eleventh-century commentator John of Avranches writes, “At feasts, the cantor gives the water covered with a linen cloth to the deacon, which the deacon mixes with wine; for by the sweet music of the cantor, the people are inflamed with pious devotion and divine love, and thus run to the Lord, and one body in Christ is made.” 📖 ▶





# Worship in the (supposed) “Dark Ages”

IT IS THE EIGHTH CENTURY in Rome, and the pope is about to preside over the Eucharist.

He has ridden on horseback from the Lateran (his cathedral) to the church where he will celebrate. It is already packed full of worshipers who arrived in processions from each of the seven regions of Rome. Around the altar sit all the clergy and bishops of Rome. The pope gets off his horse, enters the **sacristy**,<sup>†</sup>

and dresses in his vestments (see p. 37). Now the service can begin. An **acolyte**<sup>†</sup> arrives, carrying the Gospel book up to the altar; the basilica fills with music as the choir begins an introit (opening music). Enter the pope, processing solemnly with seven **acolytes**<sup>†</sup> and two deacons at his side. As they pass, another **acolyte**<sup>†</sup> presents a small casket that contains a piece of bread consecrated at the previous Mass. The pope

MINIATURE REPRESENTING A DEACON READING LITURGICAL TEXT (FRATRES CARISSIMI) (VELLUM) BY ITALIAN SCHOOL (11TH CENTURY), MUSEO DELLA CATTEDRALE DI SAN SABINO, BARI/ DE AGOSTINI PICTURE LIBRARY/ THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY





**CEREMONY AND DECORATION.** Left: Deacon reading a liturgical text in service (11th-c. Italian). Above: Eucharistic chalice, paten (plate), and **fistula**.<sup>†</sup>

bows before it and proceeds.

The vivid details we know today about this eighth-century worship

service come from the *Ordo Romanus Primus*, a book describing the liturgy as it was celebrated in Rome just before the time of Charlemagne. The *Ordo* became a model for the celebration of the Mass throughout the Holy Roman Empire for hundreds of years to come.

## From Gloria Patri to Alleluia

The pope makes his way into the upper part of the choir, near the altar, and bows again. “He then rises up, and prays, and makes the sign of the cross on his forehead.” He gives the kiss of peace to all the clergy serving with him—

from bishops to **subdeacons**<sup>†</sup>—who are also gathered in the choir; he signals that the **Gloria Patri**<sup>†</sup> should be sung. The pope kneels to pray, then rises, kisses the Gospel book, and walks to his throne at the head of the **apse**<sup>†</sup> facing east. After the choir sings the **Kyrie eleison**,<sup>†</sup> the pope leads the people in the *Gloria in excelsis* (“Glory to God in the highest”), “and at once turns back again to the east until it is finished. Then, after turning again to the people, he says *Pax vobis* [‘Peace be with you’], and once more turning to the east, says *Oremus* [‘Let us pray’], and the collect [prayer for the day] follows. At the end of it he sits, and the bishops and presbyters sit in like manner.”

The **subdeacons**<sup>†</sup> station themselves at either side of the altar, and as soon as the higher clergy are seated, one

**JOYFUL NOISE.** This 9th-c. ivory shows an archbishop amid his choir.

of the **subdeacons**<sup>†</sup> walks into the ambo—the place where Scripture is read—and reads the Epistle for the day (there is no longer any Old Testament reading). Then a choir member sings the response to the reading. If it is Easter, another sings the Alleluia. If it is Lent, a penitential song is sung.

## The Gospel lesson

Finally it is time to read the Gospel lesson for the day. A deacon kisses the pope's feet and whispers to him *Dominus sit in corde tuo et in labiis tuis* ("The Lord be in your heart and on your lips"). The deacon then kisses a large book with an ornate cover containing all the Gospel readings for the year. He bears it in front of him as he moves to the ambo accompanied by **acolytes**<sup>†</sup> with candles and **subdeacons**<sup>†</sup> swinging incense censers, who arrange themselves in front of the ambo to support the Gospel book for the deacon. When the deacon is done, the pope says *Pax tibi; Dominus vobiscum* ("Peace to you; the Lord be with you"). The people respond *Et cum spiritu tuo* ("and with your spirit"). Meanwhile the Gospel book is passed back to the **subdeacons**<sup>†</sup> who hold it to be kissed by all the clergy in the choir in order of rank. Then it is carefully sealed and carried back to the Lateran.

Although one of many medieval preaching revivals was getting underway (see "Did worship still feature the Word?" p. 16), this service features no sermon after the



Gospel. Nor is there any creed—it was still not a regular part of Western Eucharistic worship, though it was used extensively in the baptismal liturgy. Instead, the service begins to move from Word to Table.

## Bringing the gifts

An **acolyte**<sup>†</sup> and a deacon cover the altar with a corporal (a white cloth resembling a tablecloth, for the Eucharistic elements to be placed on), one "throwing the end to the second deacon so they can spread it out," and the offertory begins. While the choir sings a psalm, the pope and the archdeacons accept wine and bread (not wafers until

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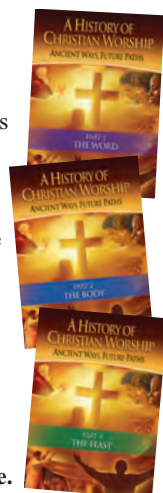
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**HONORING A MARTYR POPE.** Above: Mass celebrated in honor of the 1st-c. martyr pope St. Clement, from the 11th-c. Roman basilica dedicated to him.

several centuries later) offered by the nobility, namely “the chancellor, the secretary, and the chief counselor.” As lesser people bring up their gifts, they are received by lesser clergy. Finally the pope puts his own offering of two loaves of bread on the altar, and “bowing slightly to the altar, looks at the choir and nods to them to be silent.” An offertory prayer is said.

After the *Sursum corda*, preface, and *Sanctus* (see “Saying grace,” p. 19), everyone bows. In centuries to come, the focus will be on lifting up the Host at the moment of consecration, but here the pope lifts the bread and chalice as he ends a series of prayers with a final doxology: “Through him [Jesus Christ] and with him and in him all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, throughout the ages of ages.”

## The community in Communion

The people recite the **Pater Noster**<sup>†</sup> (Lord’s Prayer) and exchange the kiss of peace: “The archdeacon gives the peace to the chief bishop; then the rest in order and the people likewise.” Now the bread has to be broken, which takes a while, since many loaves have been brought up. The clergy assist in this, holding out little bags to receive the loaves, which the **acolytes**<sup>†</sup> bring to them. At the pope’s signal, all of the loaves are broken. The choir sings a psalm, and the pope receives Communion—first a piece of bread, except for a small fragment, which he puts in the chalice and “makes the sign of the cross three times over the fragment from which he has bitten,” and then drinks the bread and wine together. The people—men first,



and then women—follow the clergy. They come forward to receive, standing and taking the bread in their hands, then sipping from chalices of ordinary wine, each with a few drops of the consecrated blood in it. Even then, they sip through a *fistula*<sup>†</sup> to avoid spilling it.

By no means does every person present actually receive the Eucharist. Ordinary laypeople receive infrequently, because to do so they have to prepare with considerable fasting and prayer. In fact, lay participation in the Eucharist has by this time been reserved for great feast days such as (on St. Boniface's recommendation) Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.

**INSPIRED EVANGELIST.** St. Matthew, from the 8th-c. *Lindisfarne Gospels*.

When all who are going to receive have done so, the table is put in order. The pope sits down and washes his hands, then offers a prayer of thanksgiving. The deacons dismiss the people by saying *Ite missa est* ("It is time for the dismissal"—the word "Mass" comes from this phrase), and the pope and his entourage make their solemn procession out of the church and back to their horses.

Despite the ornate detail of this ceremony, it remained, as scholar Bard Thompson notes, "basically a community service of worship, its

corporate character being secured by the fact that it was *sung* in some communal setting by the celebrant, the assisting ministers, and the choir.” Over the next few centuries, though, there would be a move toward more and more private Masses offered for the repose of the souls of the dead, or for other prayer intentions, each performed by a single priest at one of the many side altars that churches would hurry to build in their sanctuaries to take advantage of this new liturgical trend.

## Kneeling to pray

In the background of the Mass droned the low and steady hum of the round of daily prayer that Egeria had noted (see “What sorts of music did worshippers use?” p. 20). Now, however, that round went on inside the walls of monasteries and convents more than it did in public worship. It also took place in “collegial” monasteries, where **secular priests**<sup>†</sup> might choose to live together in a monastic fashion, praying the daily office and being accountable to each other. (Many cathedrals started such collegial chapters in an effort to reform the behavior of their associated clergy.)


As the Early Middle Ages (500–1000) moved into the High Middle Ages (1000–1300), communal recitation of the daily office gave way to private prayer. Beautiful illuminated books of hours emerged to guide the prayers not only of monks in their cloisters but also of nobles in their castles. But the structure of the daily office remained very much the one the 7th-c. Rule of St.

## AUGUSTINE’S “FATHER.”

Five centuries after his preaching helped convert Augustine, Ambrose of Milan was still memorialized in special Masses.



Benedict had laid out, continuing to bathe the day in prayer.

More than a thousand years later, a poet writing in England in the waning days of the Second World War reflected back on this age and on these prayers. This was Charles Williams, a member of C. S. Lewis’s “Inklings” circle. Williams pictured the pope privately making the rounds of the shadowed, candlelit Lateran, praying the office before the Christmas Eucharist began, praying for the church and the world, invoking Christ. “The pope prayed: ‘Thou hast harried hell, O Blessed, and carried thence the least token of thyself. Thou hast spoken a word of power in the midst of hell.’” Williams pictures the great ceremony of the Eucharist rising as a prayer for peace, culminating in the hundreds of broken loaves. And he pictures the pope in all his finery, after the Eucharist is over, there again in the dark: “Kneeling after the Eucharist, the pope said . . . *Magnificat*; prostrate, he prayed: ‘Send not, send not the rich empty away.’” 





## What did “sacrament” mean to medieval Christians? And how many were there?

A SACRAMENT IS at the very least an outward sign of an inward grace, and “it is hard to imagine a sacramental life evolving from any religion other than Judaism,” writes liturgical scholar James White. The Jewish people, after all, knew that their God was transcendent yet also used material objects to communicate with his people: the burning

bush, the pillar of fire, the emblematic actions of the prophets.

The early church, beginning on the pages of the New Testament, gathered around a sacred meal and welcomed new Christians through baptism and anointing with oil—as well as other sacred acts such as, in White’s words, “laying on of hands, healing, sealing, and forgiving.”



**“NOT BY BREAD ALONE.”** In the matter of sacraments as in every other aspect of the Christian life, early and medieval church leaders looked first to Scripture, especially the New Testament. (Last Supper, Sant’Angelo fresco, c. 1100.)

In Greek, these acts were called *mystérion*, a word usually translated as “mystery,” but very much meaning the kind of mysterious act in which God shows himself to us. Later, Tertullian (c. 160–c. 220) translated this with the Latin word *sacramentum*, which soldiers used to denote oaths they took and intended to keep.

## God’s power—not the priest’s

While clearly God bestowed grace through these acts, the church experienced them long before it precisely defined them—

or numbered them, although baptism and Eucharist were always on the list. Today, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglicans name seven rites as sacraments (see image and caption on p. 34). Protestants other than Anglicans usually limit the list to baptism and Eucharist. But for many centuries, the list and definitions were not so clear.

Tertullian’s *On Penance* and *On Baptism* (c. 200) are more practical handbooks about how to perform and undergo these rites than they are theological reflections. Lectures for **catechumens**<sup>†</sup> (people

undergoing the rigorous multiyear process to prepare for baptism) by Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, and John Chrysostom (347–407) reflect at some length on what baptism means, but it was Augustine (354–430) who began to get more specific. He defined a sacrament memorably as “a visible word,” discussed the “invisible grace” that came through the “visible form,” and distinguished between the act itself and its power. In the Donatist controversy over who is entitled to perform the sacraments, Augustine famously argued that the sacraments communicate grace because of God’s power, not the power or the moral character of the humans who administer them.

## Ashes to baptism: the breadth of early sacramental practice

Despite establishing categories that would define Western sacramental thought for centuries, Augustine’s list of sacraments is tremendously wide-ranging by modern standards. It includes the baptismal font, the giving of salt at baptism, the Lord’s Prayer, the Nicene Creed, Easter Day, and the ashes placed on the forehead in the ceremony of penance. Other writers came up with other lists, with some overlap but little consensus on exactly what each sacrament signifies. Besides baptism and the Eucharist, public repentance (originally a one-time event), anointing of the sick for healing, marriage (despite its taking place at the door of the church and not inside), and some kinds of rites surrounding

## SEVEN FOR THE AGES.

By 1448, the likely date of this Rogier van der Weyden painting, the church recognized seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance (confession), anointing of the sick, ordination, and matrimony. Can you find them all?



Christian death and burial all took on sacramental importance in the early medieval church.

But these by no means exhausted the possibilities. Even by the twelfth century, as the church was finally formalizing its thoughts on sacraments, Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141) maintained that blessing palms, receiving ashes, bending the knee in prayer, monastic vows, saying the Creeds, dedicating a church, and death and judgment were all sacraments. The Third





**TASTE OF THINGS TO COME.** Above: In this 3rd-c. image of the loaves and fishes miracle, the red wine in the basket symbolizes Eucharist.



are baptism, confirmation, the bread of blessing (that is the Eucharist), penance, extreme unction [anointing of the dying], orders [ordination], marriage. Of these, some provide a remedy against sin and confer assisting grace, such as baptism; others are only a remedy, such as marriage; others strengthen us with grace and power,

Lateran Council of 1179 named to the list both the ordination of priests and the burial of the dead.

## Peter's list and the "sacramentals"

The man who finally nailed down this ever-evolving list was Peter Lombard (c. 1100–1160), a professor of theology and the bishop of Paris, who, in about 1150, wrote the influential *Four Books of Sentences*. In it he writes, "Now let us approach the sacraments of the new law, which

such as the Eucharist and orders." He proceeds to describe each of the seven, using Augustine's distinction between the invisible grace and the visible form but adding a third concept—that a true sacrament consists of the combination of both.

Lombard's list stuck. Some of the objects and acts not on his list stuck too—many mentioned above, as well as everything from holy water to saying grace at meals, giving to the poor, and saying the rosary—and began to be referred



**A TIGHT FIT.** This 12th-c. Italian fresco from the basilica in Aquileia shows an entire family being baptized together.



came to define Roman Catholic Eucharistic theology for both its proponents and its detractors—“transubstantiation.” While the church had maintained for

to as “sacramentals.” These were things good in themselves but lacking the dignity, and the supposed foundation in the practice of Jesus and the apostles, of Lombard’s seven. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) refined this list, to indicate that each sacrament must have the proper *matter* (the material object such as water, bread, wine, or oil) and *form* (the words of the traditional formula, such as “I baptize you” or “This is my body”). Each must also be performed by the proper *minister*, who in the act of presiding has the *intention* to do what the church does in the sacraments—as White puts it, “A priest does not perform a sacrament while acting in a play.”

## Christ present in ordinary things

One of the most important aspects of this refining was the word that

centuries that Christ was present in the Eucharist, this word first appeared in the twelfth century to describe exactly *how* he was present in terms drawn from the philosophy of Aristotle. Christ’s blood and body were actually present on the altar in *substance*, but they still looked like bread and wine on the outside, in what were called the *accidents*. Later, in the Reformation, this term would give rise to much controversy.

It is unlikely that every person in the congregation understood the finer points of these definitions. They did understand—and they came to church to experience—that Christ was truly present in these acts and that he touched their lives and their world, physically as well as spiritually: in bread, wine, oil, and water; in hands, ashes, rosaries, art, and alms; and, above all, in the Word made flesh who made all sacraments possible.  

# Clothes fit for a bishop



## CLOAK, CAP, AND STAFF.

Left: Pope Innocent III (1161/2–1216) in his pallium (cloak) and mitre (episcopal cap).

Right: A crosier (pastoral staff) decorated with a lion and a snake. The crosier was reserved for prelates at the highest levels of the church.



A BISHOP OF THE ELEVENTH century could expect to spend a significant amount of time in preparation for the celebration of Mass. Each action of preparation, including the donning of each separate vestment, would be accompanied by a specific prayer, psalm verses, or other short versicle.

After the bishop entered the church and prayed for a short time at the altar, he would enter the **sacristy**.<sup>†</sup> The vesting rite would begin with a ritual handwashing, and then the removal of his ordinary outerwear. He would then don a series of liturgical vestments in layers.

The first was the amice (*amictum* or *ephod*), a rectangular piece of cloth worn around the neck and held in place by thin strings tied around the body. Next came the alb, and then the cincture [belt]. . . .

Next, the bishop put on the stole, and then the three overtunics: the tunic, the undecorated sleeved tunic worn by **subdeacons**<sup>†</sup> at Mass; the dalmatic, the more elaborately decorated sleeved tunic worn by deacons; and the priestly chasuble. The final vestment worn by all priests was the maniple, a stylized

and elaborately decorated band of cloth worn on the wrist. . . .

Next, the bishop would put on a series of “pontifical” vestments, those reserved for episcopal use. Some vesting orders called for the donning of special pontifical stockings (*caligae* or *udones*) and soft shoes or slippers (*sandalia* or *campagi*). Others listed prayers for the bishop to recite as he put on special gloves (*chirothecae*), his episcopal ring (*annulum*), [and] his pallium (a special white circle of cloth, often embroidered with crosses, worn around the neck, granted to certain bishops by the pope). . . .

Other vestments might include the mitre (a . . . stiff cloth cap, often pointed at the top) and the crosier (*baculus* or *pedum*, a staff of pastoral office, often made of precious metals and curved at the end like a shepherd’s crook). The vesting rite could conclude with one or two “general vesting” prayers, and a series of verses and responses. ☞

*The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, by Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, “Vestments and Objects,” p. 843.





# Worship at the eve of the Reformation

IT IS EARLY SPRING at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Along an English country lane, the people of the village are walking to church. It could be a Sunday, although Mass by no means is said only on Sundays; there are frequent daily Masses, especially in large and wealthy churches with many priests. It

could be the feast day of a saint. There is no end of celebrations to draw people to the church. The villagers greet each other, exchange small talk, wander on, and listen for the sound of the church bell. They are going to church to hear, to taste, to smell, and most especially, most crucially, to see.

## A feast for the senses

Upon arrival, the faithful find much in the church to delight their senses. Reformation scholar Susan Karant-Nunn writes, “Going to church before the Reformation was a sensuous experience . . . Even in rural churches and chapels, the devout heard the sound of the bell, the intoning of the ritual prayers—mesmerizing in their unintelligible, monotonous Latin—and the special words of consecration, *Hoc est corpus meum* and *Hic est sanguis meus* [“This is my body” and “This is my blood”], by which the mundane elements of the altar underwent transubstantiation. They often saw the altar with its cloths and retable [raised shelf above the altar for cross and candlesticks], the corpse-laden crucifix, the sheen of paten [bread plate] and chalice, the glint of candlelight, the ceremonial vestments sometimes even in simple parishes worked by nuns in flowers or scenes of the Savior’s life, the transfixing motion of the priest’s hands as he raised up the Host and by God’s permission effected a miracle. They smelled the sweat of their neighbors and at the same time the heavenly fragrances of beeswax and incense. They felt holy water on their fingertips and the very flesh of Christ sacrificed as the priest placed the wafer into their mouths at the **rood screen**<sup>†</sup> or the altar steps. And they tasted, besides the plume inhaled as the **acolyte**<sup>†</sup> swung the censer, the

very body of God’s son as they closed their lips.”

Walking into the church, dipping fingertips in the holy water font, the worshipers look up to see stained glass windows depicting scenes from the Old Testament and from the lives of Jesus, Mary, and the saints. On the walls are paintings, sculptures, tapestries, frescoes,



**ART OF A LOST AGE.** Unlike this French madonna statue and British crucifixion window, much medieval devotional art did not survive Reformation iconoclasm (objection to sacred imagery as idolatrous).

and mosaics. Sacred objects such as woodcarved nativity scenes or a wooden donkey for Palm Sunday sit on the floor or on small tables or stools. Though they are made of plain wood or marble, they are painted with vivid colors. The scent of incense and burning candles pervades the church.



Quite likely, those entering the church have made some contribution to these decorations. Guilds gave money to endow statues and artwork; local craftsmen sculpted and painted; women in the church sewed and embroidered vestments, altar cloths, tapestries, and drapings and veils for statues.

## At the crux: Jesus and his saints

At the center of everything, firmly attached to the back wall of the church, is the high altar. Most likely, a saint is buried beneath it; most certainly, relics are stored inside it. The smaller the church, the more likely the average person is to be able to see the high altar fully. Larger and wealthier churches, and

**ALL EYES FORWARD.** By the Late Middle Ages (1300–1500), the focus of the Mass had long since shifted from the congregation’s reception of the elements to the priest’s enacting of a holy drama, as in this 14th-c. Italian Mass.

those with a great number of monks or **secular priests**<sup>†</sup> attached to them and worshipping in the choir space, often erected **rood screens**<sup>†</sup> between the people’s space and the choir and altar space. These were elaborately carved wooden barriers, solid from the waist down and full of windows from the waist up, with images of saints and biblical figures carved on them, and a giant crucifix in the middle. (*Rood* is an Old English word for the cross, and the screens got this name



from their central crucifix.)

**Rood screens**<sup>†</sup> were, as historian Eamon Duffy has remarked, both “a barrier and no barrier.” While they screened the activity at the high altar from the laity, sometimes the activity spilled out to meet the laity as the Gospel book, holy water, or (on Easter) the Eucharistic elements themselves were carried out into the **nave**<sup>†</sup> by the priests and deacons. At other occasions, such as Candlemas, the feast day honoring the presentation of Jesus in the temple, the people processed with candles through the door of the **rood screen**<sup>†</sup> and into the altar space.

Many screens had “elevation squints”—eyeholes cut into them at convenient places to allow the people to see the high altar and priests at different altars to see each other. Though Sunday Mass would be said at the high altar, the average weekday Mass was just as likely to be performed at one of the innumerable side chapels and altars that crowded the nooks and niches of the wealthier churches—or in front of the **rood screen**<sup>†</sup> where altars were often installed for the purpose.

And, of course, even on Sunday, people moved around to get a better view because there were no—or at least very few—pews; Karant-Nunn comments that in this era, “only princes, city counselors, and other august personages had pews.” They would not become widespread for several more centuries. Still, she notes that certain standing places became customary for certain

### **BODY, BLOOD, AND BOOK.**

Through Latin Scripture readings and, where the priest was literate, vernacular preaching, late-medieval Masses continued to emphasize the scriptural Word along with the Incarnate Word.



people, with the poor standing closer to the back. Women and elderly or ill men might bring their own collapsible stools and set them up in convenient places.

### **The action shifts from Word to Table**

And so the people watch. In essence, the form of the service is not all that different from the one we visited in the eighth century (see “Worship in the [supposed] ‘Dark Ages,’” p. 26), although, if this is a relatively simple country church, it occurs with far less pomp and ceremony. There is a processional, a greeting, the confession of sin, the Gloria, prayers, and readings for the day from the Epistle and Gospel. If the priest is literate, he preaches, not in Latin but in the language

of the congregation. Then the action shifts from Word to Table, with the creed, the offering, the priest's washing of his hands in preparation for the Holy Meal, and the long Eucharistic prayer, with its prayers for the living and the dead. The **acolytes**<sup>†</sup> swing a thurible (a large metal container on a chain), and incense fills the space around the altar. The priest faces the altar, not the people, and the prayers for the most part are silent.

A bell is rung when the words of consecration are said so that, wherever they are in the church, the people will know that the holy moment has arrived—the moment for which many people come in fact *daily* to church. Now the priest, facing the altar and beyond it (figuratively) the east of morning and Resurrection, takes

the sacred Host into his hands and raises it high so that all may see the body of the Lord. Most people receive the bread (rarely the wine)

into their mouths only yearly, at Easter, after confessing their sins to a priest during Holy Week. This annual ritual was often referred to as “taking one’s rights.” There were certainly those who received more frequently—fifteenth-century mystic Margery Kempe (see p. 52) was well known for receiving the

Eucharist weekly—but most of the faithful tasted the body of the Lord only at Easter. However, each week—even every day—they can see the Eucharistic meal take place, and the devout hunger to do so. The people hold up their hands and recite their prayers. For a moment, they are of one mind and one spirit. Everything else falls away.



## Shoving forward to receive

Those who have been to confession during the week before are allowed to come forward (often pushing and jostling each other) to receive the elements. Once the select few have been served, the communion vessels are cleaned, the Lord's Prayer said, and the kiss of peace shared. In the Middle Ages, the passing of this kiss didn't involve actual kissing. Instead, a **pax board**<sup>†</sup> was held between the attendees, and each person kissed one side of the board.

The Mass closes with prayers and a dismissal. The priest, deacons, and **acolytes**<sup>†</sup> process out of the church, and the Mass comes to an end. Slowly, the faithful file out again into the sunlight and travel home along the lane.



But soon again they will return. They will come for the next Mass. They will arrive in a torch-lit procession—or quietly, on their own—to adore the consecrated Host as it sits in its monstrance, a large and ornate container, on the altar. Or, when services are not occurring, they'll come with members of their guild to repair that window that needs fixing or paint that statue

that really could use it or tighten that floorboard that creaks. Or they'll come with other women of the parish, because didn't you notice that one of the altar cloths has a hole in it? Or they'll come to make sure fresh candles are burning in front of the paintings and statues. In short, they'll come to maintain the house of the Lord and to meet him there. Summer will come, and autumn, and winter, and year will turn to year and decade to decade.

But this devoted pilgrimage won't last. Within 150 years, after theses are nailed to a door in Wittenberg, the crucifixes will be torn down, the candles extinguished, the vessels stolen, and the faces of the saints and angels and the Virgin Mary will be scratched out of paintings and scraped off of statues. But the faithful who labor here for their Lord do not know that now. ☞

### A FEAST FIT FOR A KING.

The dramatic elevation of the host (*above left*), diffusion of pungent incense (*above right*), and rich artworks throughout the sanctuary (*left*) made medieval worship a feast for the senses. (The **rood screen**<sup>†</sup> at left shows the 9th-c. Anglo-Saxon king St. Edmund along with two other kings and three Old Testament prophets.)







# What did the worship space look like?

OF THE MANY CHANGES Constantine's conversion brought to the church, perhaps none was more dramatic than the shift in the architecture of worship spaces. Before Constantine, few buildings were erected specifically for worship. The church historian Eusebius mentions that by the late third century there were "churches of spacious foundations in every city"—but many were destroyed by enemies of the growing Christian movement.

Intense persecution led to most Christians meeting in house churches. The best-preserved example, at Dura Europos on the Euphrates River, featured a large room for the Eucharist, with a small platform on which sat an altar table and the bishop's throne. A separate room served as a baptistery, complete with baptismal font.

Constantine changed all that. He sought to establish his new-found faith more firmly by giving money to build nine new churches in Rome and others in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Constantinople. These magnificently appointed buildings looked almost nothing like the old house churches. Instead, they were based on the plan of a basilica, or



Roman law court. Some basilica churches were actually former secular basilicas, now occupied by the very same Christian worshippers who had once been tried within them as criminals against the state.

## The body of Christ in the body of the basilica

Whether repurposed or new, basilicas possessed a uniform floorplan: a rectangular "body" capped with a semicircular "head" called the **apse**.<sup>†</sup> This is where the Roman judge had been seated on a throne. Now the Christian bishop replaced him, surrounded by presbyters (ordained elders/priests) sitting in chairs on either side.

The people gathered for worship in the long, narrow, rectangular body of the building, called the **nave**.<sup>†</sup> There, until the fourteenth century when pews were invented, worshippers simply moved about to follow the action of the service: Scripture readings, prayers, processions, the sermon, and increasingly, the consecration of the Host on

### CONSTANTINE PRAYED HERE.

*Left:* Santa Constanza Church, Rome, built by Constantine as a mausoleum for his daughter.

*Above:* Dura Europos.



various altars throughout the church. Platforms for singers extended out of the **apse**<sup>†</sup> into the **nave**.<sup>†</sup> One end of these featured a pulpit, and a prominent altar table occupied the middle.

Oddly enough, the pulpit was not originally used for preaching. While Scripture readers and other worship leaders used the pulpit, the bishop preached from his seat. This arrangement lasted until the golden-tongued but soft-voiced John Chrysostom (347–407) moved closer to the people to preach. The bishop also presided over the Eucharist, facing the people across the altar table.

In the fifth century, as the relics of saints became more popular, many saints' bodies were actually buried directly under altar tables. Baptismal fonts could appear anywhere—even in a separate building. Most usually, however, the font stood at the entrance to the church building—a physical

### SANCTIFYING SECULAR SPACE.

Santa Pudenziana was a civil basilica turned into a church. Note the Constantinian buildings in its mosaic. Below: **Rood screen**,<sup>†</sup> 12th-c. Venetian.

reminder that Christians came into God's church through baptism.

### Altar & pulpit divide

Throughout the Western Middle Ages, the rectangular body of







**FACE TO FACE.** Chancel<sup>†</sup> of the 12th-c. Tewkesbury Abbey, England. Monks sat in the stalls on each side, chanting psalm verses in turn. In parish churches (which Tewkesbury later became), noble families sat in these seats.

the basilica grew longer and more ornate. (Eastern Orthodox architecture moved instead toward featuring large domes over square buildings.) The altar moved farther and farther away from the **nave**<sup>†</sup> and was eventually attached to the back wall of the **apse**.<sup>†</sup>

This accompanied a significant change in the way a bishop presided over the Eucharist—no longer did he face the congregation as he spoke the Eucharistic prayer. The altar was changed from a table to a square box so that it could contain saints’ relics. Side altars—which became entire side chapels for private Masses, including requiem Masses for the dead—were installed along the **nave**<sup>†</sup> (relics ended up here too). Extending the trend set by Chrysostom, pulpits (increasingly

large and ornate) moved out into the **nave**<sup>†</sup> so that congregations could better hear the preacher.

The trendsetting worship spaces of the High and Late Middle Ages, however, were the chapels of monasteries, which had the architectural plan every other church wanted to copy. In this layout, the **apse**<sup>†</sup> became a long **chancel**,<sup>†</sup> with stalls on either side where the monks could chant the psalms **antiphonally**<sup>†</sup> (alternating from side to side).

Large cathedrals took this plan and added side chapels to the **chancel**.<sup>†</sup> Even small parish churches adopted the plan, installing the clergy and the local noble family in the monastic stalls while the rest of the congregation continued to worship in the **nave**.<sup>†</sup>




## A womb of sacred imagery

While we tend to think of ornate art as the purview of wealthy churches, the average medieval church held an ample share of visual imagery and sensory stimulation. However, fervent Reformation-era Protestants removed the art and images from so many Western European churches—and in most cases today these have been imperfectly restored—that it is hard for modern observers to grasp just how much there was to see.

Walking into a medieval church was like entering a womb of sacred imagery. Carved and painted **reredos**<sup>†</sup> (the back wall behind the main altar); statues, paintings, and tapestries along the walls and in side altars; stained-glass windows; mosaics, paintings, and even tombstones on the floors all spoke of divine things as loudly as the Word or sacraments. Above all loomed the great crucifix, or rood, over the **rood**

**“MANY MANSIONS.”** Chartres Cathedral, France, with its characteristically soaring Gothic arches.

**screen**,<sup>†</sup> or panel, with a picture of Judgment Day above or behind it. These greeted the worshiper’s eyes as she raised them during the fulcrum of the Eucharistic liturgy when the priest elevated the Host for everyone to see.

Many of these images were donated and cared for by guilds and members of the parish, who also bore the not inconsiderable expense of candles and lamps to illuminate all that visual richness! The well-off commonly willed items to the church with very specific instructions about how and when these items should be displayed. Just before the Reformation, one English congregant left instructions that her second-best rosary be hung on a statue of St. Anne all year, but her best rosary was to be used on St. Anne’s feast day. 

# Of sermons and friars



Anecdotes such as this appeared in collections of sermon illustrations:

A certain knight loved most ardently the martyr St. Thomas of Canterbury, and sought everywhere to obtain some relic of him. When a certain wily priest, in whose house he was staying, heard of this he said to him, "I have by me a bridle which St. Thomas used for a long time, and I have often experienced its virtues." When the knight heard this, and believed it, he joyfully paid the priest the money which the latter demanded and received the bridle with great devotion.

God truly, to whom nothing is impossible, wishing to reward the faith of the knight and for the honor of his martyr, deigned to work many miracles through the same bridle. The knight seeing this founded a church in honor of the martyr and in

## "USEFUL AND EDIFYING."

A friar preaches to a rapt group.

it he placed as a relic the bridle of that most wicked priest. (Caesar of Heisterbach, Dist. VIII, Cap. LXX. [Vol. 2, p. 140], in *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*)

*This excerpt is from the Franciscan Rule of 1223, which still governs the Franciscan order. It lays down some guidelines for the friars' preaching:*

The friars must not preach in the diocese of any bishop if they have been forbidden to do so by him. And no brother should dare preach to the people unless he has been examined and approved by the minister general of his brotherhood and the office of preaching has been conceded to him. I also admonish and exhort the brothers that in their preaching their words be studied and chaste, useful and edifying to the people, telling them about vices and virtues, punishment and glory; and they ought to be brief, because the Lord kept his words brief when he was on earth. ¶

(<http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/stfran-rule.asp>.)

## ANSWERS TO QUIZ (PAGE 2)

- |              |                    |                   |                     |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Apse      | 8. Propers         | and acolytes      | 17. Secular priests |
| 2. Nave      | 9. Subdeacons/     | 11. Catechumens   | 18. Anamnesis       |
| 3. Reredos   | subdiaconate       | 12. Sacristy      | 19. Epiclesis       |
| 4. Chancel   | 10. Porters        | 13. Gloria Patri  | 20. Postils         |
| 5. Antiphon  | [doorkeepers],     | 14. Kyrie eleison | 21. Prone           |
| 6. Polyphony | lectors [readers], | 15. Pater noster  | 22. Rood screens    |
| 7. Ordinary  | exorcists,         | 16. Fistula       | 23. Pax board       |





# Who led worship?

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT and in early church writings such as the *Didache*, we see a variety of church leadership roles—including wandering prophets. But sometime in the first or second century, a threefold ordained ministry began to emerge: bishops, presbyters (priests), and deacons. The bishop was the governmental and sacramental center of the church in any given location—the chief preacher and administrator of the Eucharist. Presbyters administered the sacraments under the bishop’s direction. Deacons assisted in the sacraments and in acts of mercy and outreach

including caring for the sick and poor.

## Entering leadership

The *Apostolic Tradition* document, which appears to describe early third-century practice, though it may be as late as the fourth century, gives a model for ordination. The church first approved those candidates who had the gifts and graces for their ministries. Then the bishop and, in some circumstances, other leaders laid hands on the candidates and prayed over them. Interestingly, those “confessors” who had been imprisoned on account of their

**TOP MAN.** Left: A bishop's ordination, 14th c. Below: Some argue this 9th-c. "Episcopa Theodora" mosaic shows a woman bishop.

faith during periods of persecution received no further ordination rites unless they desired to become bishops; their "ordination in blood" and sacrifice was enough. Deaconesses, who were especially important in preparing female converts for baptism and in performing acts of mercy to women and children, were ordained for this role in the East although not in the West.

This does not, however, mean that ordained clergy were the only people involved in worship. The *Apostolic Tradition* distinguishes the roles in church leadership—liturgical and otherwise—of "widows, readers, virgins, **subdeacons**<sup>†</sup> and healers." In addition, almost any service would have featured church musicians (see "What sorts of music did worshippers use?" p. 20). Soon four "minor orders"—**porters**<sup>†</sup> (doorkeepers), **lectors**<sup>†</sup>, **exorcists**<sup>†</sup>, and **acolytes**<sup>†</sup>—began to develop, largely with liturgical functions, and ordination rites were developed for them. Originally these rites simply consisted of giving the ordinands tools symbolic of their trades: keys, books of lessons, books of exorcisms, and candles.

The "major orders" comprised **subdeacons**<sup>†</sup> (basically deacons-in-training), deacons, and priests. Ordination to these orders included a pledge of celibacy as well as the act of tonsure (cutting of the hair).

## Limiting women

Women participated in various roles in worship leadership, including serving as musicians, readers, and deaconesses. Several of the heretical groups that grew up on early Christianity's fringes allowed women full sacramental powers, and this led the orthodox Catholic Church to limit the roles women could take in leading worship. The move from house churches under persecution to churches in public spaces under Constantine also contributed to this shift. A Roman matron might exercise great authority over a church gathered within her household, but there were certain ways Roman women

were expected to behave, and not behave, in public. Increasing attention was paid to how women arrived at church, acted in worship, dressed, and wore their hair: one Syrian church order forbade women from wearing

jewelry to worship or receiving the Eucharist if their hair was artificially curled. Ambrose (d. 397) told virgins not to sigh, clear their throats, cough, or laugh during worship services.

The later Middle Ages brought little change to these basic structures of church order, only greater ceremony in the methods of ordination and the continued growth of monasteries and convents, where much daily medieval worship was centered. While laypeople might attend services in a monastery or (less likely) convent chapel, they would not have engaged in leadership roles in the services. ☒



# A pilgrim's Eucharist

*In this excerpt from her autobiography, mystic and pilgrim Margery Kempe tells of her visit to the Holy Land and her desire to receive the Eucharist at various holy sites.*

Afterwards she was houselled [received the Eucharist] on the Mount of Calvary, and then she wept, she sobbed, she cried so loud that it was a wonder to hear it. She was so full of holy thoughts and meditations and holy contemplations on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and holy dalliance that Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke to her soul that she could never express them after, so high and so holy were they. Much was the grace that Our Lord shewed to this creature whilst she was three weeks in Jerusalem.

Another day, early in the morning, they . . . came to Mount Sion. And ever this creature wept abundantly . . . for compassion of Our Lord's Passion. On Mount Sion is a place where Our Lord washed his disciples' feet and, a little therefrom, He made His Maundy [Last Supper] with His disciples.

And therefore this creature had great desire to be houselled in that holy place where Our Merciful Lord Christ Jesus first consecrated His precious Body in the form of bread, and gave it to His disciples. And so she was, with great devotion and plentiful tears and boisterous sobbings. . . .

And when this creature came to the place where the apostles received the Holy Ghost, Our Lord gave her great devotion. Afterwards she went to the place where Our Lady was buried, and as she knelt on her knees



**HEARTLAND OF FAITH.** Pilgrims wend their way to the Holy Land in this 15th-c. travelogue image.

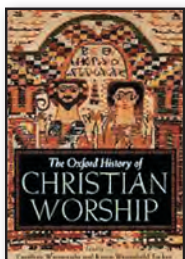
the time of two masses, Our Lord Jesus Christ said to her:

"Thou comest not hither, daughter, for any need except merit and reward, for thy sins were forgiven thee ere thou came here and therefore thou comest here for the increasing of thy reward and thy merit. And I am well pleased with thee, daughter, for thou standest under obedience to Holy Church, and because thou wilt obey thy confessor and follow his counsel who, through authority of Holy Church, hath absolved thee of thy sins. . . . Notwithstanding all this, I command thee in the Name of Jesus, daughter, that thou go visit these holy places and do as I bid thee, for I am above Holy Church, and I shall go with thee and keep thee right well." ☒



# Recommended resources

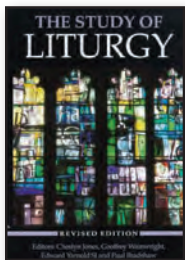
## I. Overview histories and reference books



***Oxford History of Christian Worship***, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen Westerfield Tucker. Excel-

lent one-volume scholarly overview of Christian worship across the centuries and around the globe. Articles written by Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox authors focus on theological, historical, and geographical topics.

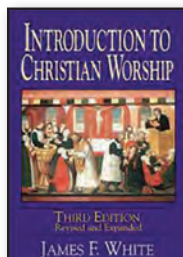
***The Complete Library of Christian Worship***, ed. Robert Weber. Probably best described as an encyclopedia, these seven volumes feature discussions of worship from scriptural, historical, theological, and practical angles. Includes many primary-source texts. Emphasizes recapturing the richness of liturgical tradition for contemporary use.



***The Study of Liturgy***, ed. Cheslyn Jones et al. Features many short essays on historical eras of Christian worship

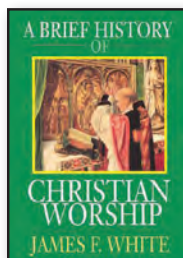
and on important topics: initiation, the Eucharist, ordination, the daily office, music, and the Christian year. As with the *Oxford*

*History*, contributors come from across the Christian spectrum.



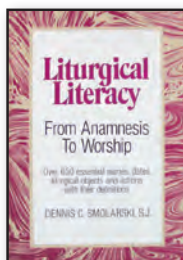
***Introduction to Christian Worship*** by James F. White. This is frequently used as a seminary textbook in classes

on worship. It opens with a discussion of what is meant by worship and proceeds topically through liturgical time and space, church music, the service of the Word, and the sacraments.



***A Brief History of Christian Worship*** by James F. White. Written in the same readable style as his *Introduction*, this is a short

but clear survey of how Christians have worshiped from New Testament times to the present.



***Liturgical Literacy*** by Dennis Smolarski, S. J. A useful short dictionary to have on hand when trying

to navigate unfamiliar liturgical terms. It focuses on their use in current practice.

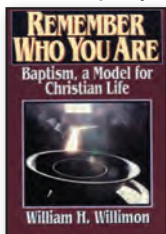
***Bibliography of Christian Worship*** by Bard Thompson. Although now over 20 years old, this was at the time of its compilation the most complete guide to books and articles on the subject of worship and remains an excellent window into older literature on the topic.

## II. Liturgical theology

***Eucharist: Christ's Feast with the Church; Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church; and Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church*** by Lawrence Hull Stookey.

These books discuss their respective topics both historically and practically, with an eye toward improving current church practice.

***Sunday Dinner: The Lord's Supper and the Christian Life*** and ***Remember Who You Are: Baptism as a Model for Christian Life*** by

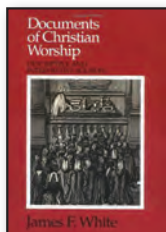


William Willimon. Bishop Willimon focuses on these two sacraments practically and devotionally.

## III. Primary sources

***Documents of Christian Worship***

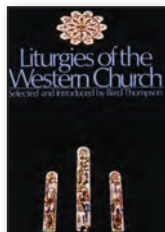
by James F. White. Presents a broad cross-section of documents from all Christian eras, as well as photographs and plans of



worship spaces. Arranged topically rather than by era to correspond to White's *Introduction*.

***Liturgies of the Western Church***

by Bard Thompson. Includes services of Word and Eucharist for



a number of eras and traditions, from Justin Martyr to John Wesley's *Sunday Service*, with a helpful historical introduction to each service.

***Prayers of the Eucharist:***

***Early and Reformed*** by R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming.

Eucharistic prayers from the early



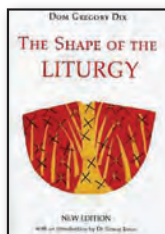
church to the later Middle Ages, and (despite the "Reformed" in the title) from Lutheran, Anglican, and Calvinist

liturgies from the Reformation until the eighteenth century.

## IV. The early church and the Early Middle Ages

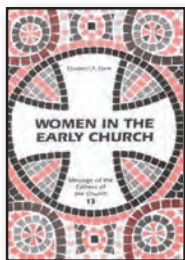
***The Shape of the Liturgy*** by

Dom Gregory Dix. This is a



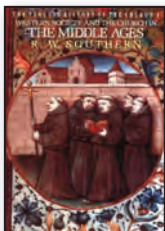
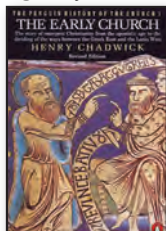
classic, and highly detailed, account of how the Eucharist developed during the first few Christian centuries.

**Women in the Early Church** by Elizabeth Clark. This book discusses



all aspects of women's roles in early Christianity, including their roles in worship.

**The Early Church** by Henry Chadwick and **Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages** by R. W. Southern. These

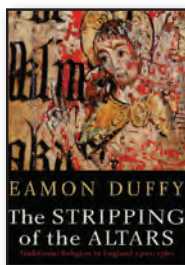


are the first two volumes of the Penguin History of the Church series, and both devote considerable space to issues of worship.

## V. The High and Late Middle Ages

**The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Introduction and Guide for Students and Musicians** by John Harper. Extensively detailed orders of service, with a special emphasis on how music was used in the liturgy.

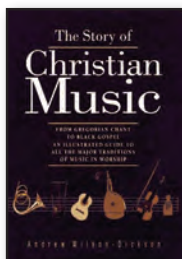
**The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580** by Eamon Duffy. Although the second part of this book focuses on changes made due to the Reformation, the first part is



an evocative and detailed account of exactly what it felt like to be a medieval English worshiper, and why.

**The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany** by Susan Karant-Nunn. Like Duffy, Karant-Nunn prefaces her story of Reformation changes with a thorough picture of pre-Reformation practice.

## VI. Church music



**The Story of Christian Music** by Andrew Wilson-Dickson. Detailed historical account of

church music from the New Testament to the twentieth century, full of pictures and primary-source excerpts.



**A History of Western Music** by Donald Jay Grout et al. Now in its eighth edition, this is a classic music history

textbook that, due to the centrality of the church to Western musical tradition, extensively discusses the use of music in worship. ☐

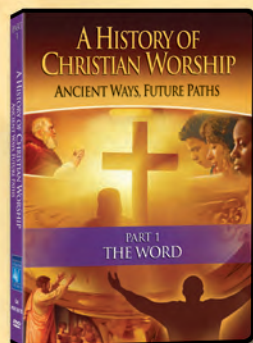


# A HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP ON DVD

For followers of Jesus Christ, worship has spanned over two thousand years and included a long and diverse history of sacred practices. **A History of Christian Worship** is a six-part series that explores centuries of worship practices, as seen through the eyes of Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches. These programs feature some of today's most recognized and respected scholars and leaders on the subject of Christian worship, including Dr. James Hart, Dr. Lester Ruth, and Dr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, among others. Viewers will discover the significant people and events that have shaped history and learn how some modern worship practices are rooted in the earliest foundations of the Christian faith. Each DVD includes two half-hour programs.

**Part 1: The Word** explores how the written and spoken word, consisting of Scriptures, sermons, and creeds, has celebrated God's story throughout centuries of Christianity, including

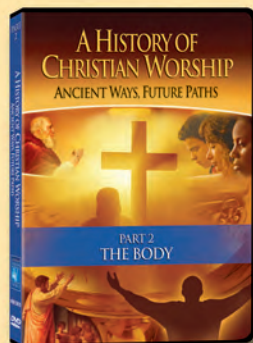
- what early church documents reveal about ancient worship,
- how stained glass has been used to tell the stories of Scripture,
- why influences such as the printing press dramatically changed how Scripture is used in worship,
- how great preaching movements of the church have influenced the development of sermons, and
- why creeds are an important tool for teaching the essentials of the Christian faith.



DVD - #501367D

**Part 2: The Body** explores how individuals are joined with the body of Christ through baptism and how Christian community is essential to the worship experience, including

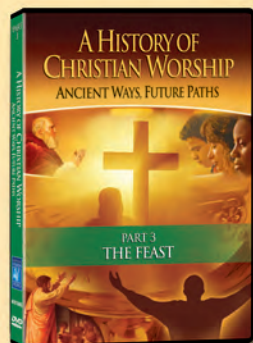
- what early church documents and practices teach us about how baptism is celebrated today,
- why there are different forms of baptism among various Christian traditions,
- how the Scriptures and church history support the community of believers as an important part of worship, and
- how one unique contemporary community of believers celebrates worship through its western-themed cowboy church.



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**Part 3: The Feast** explores the significance of Communion in worship and reveals how the observance of special days and seasons of remembrance and anticipation such as Advent and Lent is essential to the worship experience, including

- what early church documents and practices teach us about how Communion is celebrated today,
- why the feast of the Table is called by different names: Eucharist, Communion, the Lord's Supper,
- what the different methods of celebrating Communion are among various Christian traditions, and
- how Old Testament feast days and festivals have formed a pattern for the current Christian calendar.



DVD - #501386D

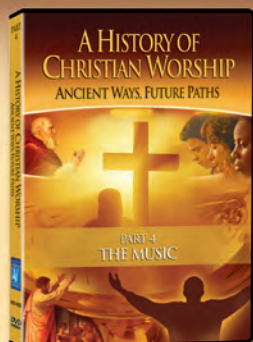
# “Worship proclaims, enacts, and sings God’s story”

~ Worship scholar Robert Webber

**Part 4: The Music** explores how liturgy and music have enriched the celebration of God’s story throughout centuries of Christianity, including

- why time, place, structure, and symbols are significant components of worship,
- how church music has evolved, from plainsong and chant to hymns and modern praise songs,
- what the history of liturgy and music teaches us about the debate over worship style, and
- how Jason Houser, a singer/songwriter and country music producer, helps families learn Scripture through music.

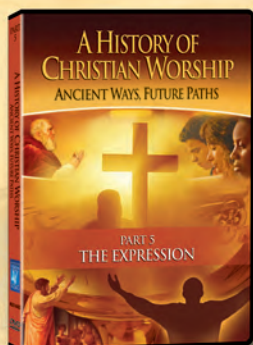
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**Part 5: The Expression** explores how visual art, drama, and media have been used in various times and places in Christian worship for the creative expression of the faith, including

- how paintings, sculptures, stained glass, and icons visually convey God’s story,
- why worship space and architecture influence and enhance the worship experience,
- what types of media have been used at various times in Christian worship, and
- how the digital age and the advent of advanced technology have impacted worship.

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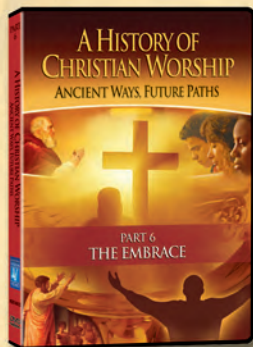


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**Part 6: The Embrace** explores the inward worship practices of prayer and contemplation and the outward acts of worship found in service and ministry, including

- how beloved prayers such as the Lord’s Prayer have become an essential part of our ongoing dialogue with God,
- why public and private prayer are essential to Christian worship,
- how the church throughout the centuries has carried its message to the world through missions and caring for the poor, imprisoned, sick, and dying, and
- how a ministry called Broken Chains reaches out to the biker subculture with the Gospel message.

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