

REFORMATION WORSHIP

The Westminster morning service follows the classical pattern of the major Protestant Reformers as they sought to return Christian worship to the pattern and elements of the immediate post-Apostolic church. The service consists of four major parts—the acts of entrance, the ministry of the Word, the ministry of prayer and the acts of commitment. Not only does the practice of “classic” worship place the focus on Almighty God himself and his majesty—as opposed to human personalities and entertainment—but the “means of Grace” are central in the service.

THE LORD’S DAY AT WESTMINSTER

11:00 A.M. Morning Service

WOMEN’S READING GROUP WILL RETURN NEXT LORD’S DAY

REVIVAL PRAYER WILL RETURN NEXT LORD’S DAY

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

The German Palatinate (southwestern Germany) became Lutheran in 1546. However, Calvinism also exercised a great deal of influence. When Frederick III, “the Pious,” became heir to the electorate of the Palatinate in 1559, he inherited also the continuing debate concerning which expression of the Reformation held the correct, biblical view of the Lord’s Supper—Calvin’s receptionism or Luther’s consubstantiation. Frederick and his wife, Mary, began a thorough study of the question and in 1561 came to the conclusion that Calvin held the correct position. In order to both advance this conviction, and to defend his position against Lutheran princes, Frederick asked the theological faculty in Heidelberg to draw up a new catechism that could be used for instruction and as a confession of faith. The catechism was later adopted by the Synod of Dort (Dutch, 1618-19), and soon became the most widely used catechism and confession of the Reformation.

*BOOK OF THE MONTH: *On the Incarnation* by St. Athanasius*

Westminster Presbyterian Church

THE FESTIVAL OF THE INCARNATION

eleven o’clock

Lord’s Day, December 29, 2024

Visitors will note that the Westminster morning service proceeds without announcement. Written direction is found in the bulletin for each component of the corporate expression of worship of the Almighty and Majestic Triune God. The service is planned in this manner so as to eliminate as much as possible interruptions of the flow of thought and expressions of reverent worship that is commensurate with the majesty of Almighty God. This worship begins with the prelude.

*Indicates the congregation standing, as one is able.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

REBIRTH (REGENERATION)

It was Jesus who first declared that spiritual rebirth was an absolute necessity for entering the kingdom of God. He declared to Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The word *unless* in Jesus’ teaching signals a universally necessary condition for seeing and entering the kingdom of God. Rebirth, then, is an essential part of Christianity; without it, entrance into God’s kingdom is impossible. *Regeneration* is the theological term used to describe rebirth. It refers to a new generating, a new genesis, a new beginning. It is more than “turning over a new leaf”; it marks the beginning of a new life in a radically renewed person. Peter speaks of believers having “been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (I Peter 1:23).

Regeneration is the work of Holy Spirit upon those who are spiritually dead (see Ephesians 2:1-10). The Spirit recreates the human heart, quickening it from spiritual death to spiritual life. Regenerate people are new creations. Where formerly they had no disposition, inclination, or desire for the things of God, now they are disposed and inclined toward God. In regeneration, God plants a desire for Himself in the human heart that otherwise would not be there.

Regeneration is not the fruit or result of faith. Rather, *regeneration precedes faith* as the necessary condition for faith. We also do not in any way dispose ourselves toward regeneration or cooperate as coworkers with the Holy Spirit to bring it to pass. We do not decide or choose to be regenerated. God chooses to regenerate us before we will ever choose to embrace Him. To be sure, *after* we have been regenerated by the sovereign grace of God, we do choose, act, cooperate, and believe in Christ. (see Ephesians 2:1-10)

—The Rev. R. C. Sproul, Drs. (Free Uni., NL)

The Prelude

O Little Town of Bethlehem . . . Traditional English melody, arr. Vaughan Williams
The First Noel 17th century English carol, harm. Stainer
Once in Royal David’s City Gauntlett

**The First Lesson* – Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (ESV)

**The Hymn No. 195* – “Joy to the world!” *Antioch*

**The Invocation and the Lord’s Prayer*

Our Father, who art in heaven; Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done; On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts; As we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil; For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

**The Response* (Sung by all) *Divinum mysterium*
Christ, to thee, with God the Father, and, O Holy Ghost, to thee, hymn, and chant, and high thanksgiving, and unwearied praises be, honor, glory, and dominion, and eternal victory, evermore and evermore! (by Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, 405)

+The Interlude – The First Noel 17th century English carol, harm. Stainer

**The Ascription of Praise* (Sung by all) *St. Michael*
God from on high hath heard; let sighs and sorrows cease; lo! from the opening heav’n descends to man the promised Peace. Hark! through the silent night angelic voices swell; their joyful songs proclaim that “God is born on earth to dwell.” (by Charles Coffin, 1736)

**The Apostles’ Creed*

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost; Born of the Virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell;* The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body; And the Life everlasting. Amen.

*i. e. His body continued in the state of the dead until the third day.
(from the 2nd c.; the term “Catholic” is the Anglicization of the Latin for universal)

**The Gloria Patri* (Sung by all) *Greatorrex*
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen. (2nd cent.)

**The Great Commandment* (Unison)

And he [*Jesus*] said . . . “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (St. Matthew 22:37-40 [Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18]) (ESV)

**The Response* (Sung by all) *Toulon*
Spirit of God, who dwells within my heart, wean it from sin, through all its pulses move. Stoop to my weakness, mighty as you are, and make me love you as I ought to love. I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies, no sudden rending of the veil of clay, no angel visitant, no op’ning skies; but take the dimness of my soul away. Did you not bid us love you, God and King, love you with all our heart and strength and mind? I see the cross—there teach my heart to cling. O let me seek you and O let me find! (by George Croly, popular Anglican preacher in a poor section of London, 1867, alt.)

**The Second Lesson* – Hebrews 1:1-3; I John 2:1b-2 (Responsively)

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

. . . if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (ESV)

**The Silent Prayers of God’s People*

**The Pastoral Prayer*

**The Response* (Sung by all) *Hyfrydol*
Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heav’n, to earth come down: fix in us your humble dwelling, all your faithful mercies crown: Jesus, you are all compassion, pure, unbounded love you are; visit us with your salvation, enter ev’ry trembling heart. Finish, then, your new creation; pure and spotless let us be: let us see your great salvation perfectly made known in you; changed from glory into glory, till in heav’n we take our place, till we cast our crowns before you, lost in wonder, love, and praise. (by Charles Wesley, brother of John Wesley, wrote 6,500 hymns, 1747, alt.)

***The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)**

Pastor: Q. 29. Why is the Son of God called “Jesus,” meaning “savior”?
Congregation: A. Because he saves us from our sins. Salvation cannot be found in anyone else; it is futile to look for any salvation elsewhere. (Matt. 1:21; Acts 4:10-12; 10:43; I Tim 2:5)
Pastor: Q. 31. Why is he called “Christ,” meaning “anointed”?
Congregation: A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our deliverance; our only high priest who has set us free by the one sacrifice of his body; and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us. (Matt. 21:5; 28:18-20; Lk. 3:21-22; 4:14-21; 24:19-27, 44-48; Jn. 1:14-18; 10:27-30; Acts 3:22; Rom. 8:34-39; I Tim. 1:15-17; Heb. 7:15-27; 9:11-14; 10:5-12)

***The Response** (Sung by all) *New Britain*
Dear Name! the rock on which I build, my shield and hiding place, my never failing treas’ry filled with boundless stores of grace; Jesus, my Shepherd, Brother, Friend, O Prophet, Priest and King, my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End, accept the praise I bring. (by John Newton, author of 280 hymns, 1779)

The Interlude – O Little Town of Bethlehem Redner

The Third Lesson – St. John 1:5, 9 (Pew Bible, p. 886 , Large Print, p. 1053)

The Sermon – THE TRUE LIGHT Mr. Brown

***The Hymn** – “The Father’s sole-begotten Son” *Mendon*
The Father’s sole-begotten Son was born, the virgin’s child, on earth; his cross for us adoption won, the life and grace of second birth.
Forth from the height of heav’n he came, in form of man with man abode; redeem’d his world from death and shame, the joys of endless life bestow’d.
Eternal glory, Lord, to thee, whom, now reveal’d, our hearts adore; to God the Father glory be, and Holy Spirit evermore. (anonymous, from 13th century or earlier)

***The Benediction**

***The Response** (Sung by all) *Truro*
Good news from heav’n did angels bring, glad tidings to the earth they sang: to us this day a Child is giv’n, to crown us with the joy of heav’n. Glory to God in highest heav’n, who unto man his Son hath given, while angels sing with tender mirth, a glad new year to all the earth. (by Martin Luther, 1535, tr. Arthur T. Russell, 1848, Catherine Winkworth, 1865)

The Postlude – *Sussex Carol* Traditional English carol, arr. Vaughan Williams

GEORGE WHITEFIELD FROM HIS “TRUE WAY OF KEEPING CHRISTMAS”
It was love, mere love; it was free love that brought the Lord Jesus Christ into our World . . . it should excite us to prayer, that we might have an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ; that the blood which he spilt upon Mount Calvary, and his death and crucifixion, might make an atonement for our sins, that we might be made holy; that we might be enabled to put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, even the Lord Jesus Christ; that we may throw away the heavy yoke of sin, and put on the yoke of the Lord Jesus Christ. (from *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield*)

HOW CHRIST GIVES HIMSELF TO BELIEVERS
In order to give himself to us, Christ gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was given to him to live in all his fullness by the Father. This Spirit, dwelling in Christ in all his fullness, Christ in turn gives to all believers to dwell in them (*John* 14:14-20; *I Cor.* 6:17; *Rom.* 8:9). Thus the glorious union between Christ and believers is brought about. For as in his incarnation he took our nature into personal union with his own, so by the Holy Spirit he takes us into a mystical union with himself.

This mystical union is a glorious illustration of God’s wisdom. The same Spirit who dwells in him as the head dwells in the church as his body, giving life to all the elect.
—John Owen (1616-1683), vice chancellor Oxford, the Puritans “theologian’s theologian”
From *The Glory of Christ: Abridged*, ed. R. J. K. Law, (Banner, 1994), pp. 87-88

PULPIT GUEST
We welcome Westminster missionary **The Reverend Ethan P. Brown** to the Westminster Pulpit. Ethan was adopted into a Christian home as an infant and does not remember a time when he did not know Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He took a B.S. in Business Management and a B.A. in Classics from the University of Florida. He went on to serve as a campus ministry intern for two years with Reformed University Fellowship (RUF), our denomination’s campus ministry, at Duke University and then moved to Charlotte, NC, where he completed his Master of Divinity at Reformed Theological Seminary. He currently serves as the RUF Campus Minister at the University of Illinois. Ethan is married to the former Amanda Kay Langston, daughter of Westminster Deacon and Mrs. Kerry S. Langston. They are the parents of three young children.

JUSTIFICATION AND MERIT

The doctrine of justification, the storm center of the Reformation, was for Paul the heart of the gospel (Rom. 1:17; 3:21-5:21; Gal. 2:15-5:1), shaping his message (Acts 13:38-39) and his devotion (II Cor. 5:13-21; Phil. 3:4-14). Though other New Testament writers affirm the same doctrine in substance, the terms in which Protestants have affirmed and defended it for almost five centuries are drawn primarily from Paul.

Justification is God's act of pardoning sinners and accepting them as righteous for Christ's sake. In it, God puts permanently right their previously estranged relationship with Himself. This justifying sentence is God's bestowal of a status of acceptance for Jesus' sake. (II Cor. 5:21).

God's justifying judgment seems strange, for pronouncing sinners righteous may appear to be precisely the kind of unjust action by a judge that God's own law forbids (Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15). Yet it is a just judgment, for its basis is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. As "the last Adam (I Cor. 15:45), our representative head acting on our behalf, Christ obeyed the law that bound us and endured the punishment for lawlessness that we deserved and so "merited" our justification. Our justification is on a just basis (Rom. 3:25-26; I John 1:9), with Christ's righteousness reckoned to our account (Rom. 5:18-19).

God's justifying decision is in effect the judgment of the Last Day regarding where we will spend eternity, brought forward into the present and pronounced here and now. It is a judgment on our eternal destiny; God will never go back on it, however much Satan may appeal against the verdict (Zech. 3:1; Rom. 8:33-34; Rev. 12:10). To be justified is to be eternally secure (Rom. 5:1-5; 8:30).

The necessary means of justification is personal faith (*trust*) in Jesus Christ as crucified Savior and risen Lord (Rom. 4:23-25; 10:8-13). Faith is necessary because the meritorious ground of our justification is entirely in Christ. As we give ourselves in faith to Jesus, Jesus gives us His gift of righteousness, so that in the very act of "closing with Christ," as older Reformed teachers put it, we receive the divine pardon and acceptance we can find nowhere else (Gal. 2:15-16; 3:24).

Historic Roman Catholic theology includes sanctification in the definition of justification, considered as a process rather than a single decisive event, and affirms that while faith contributes to our acceptance with God, our works of sanctification, and merit must contribute too . . . On the Roman Catholic view, believers effect their own salvation with the help of the grace that flows from Christ through the church's sacramental system. The Reformers pointed out that this view of salvation undercuts the sense of confidence that only free grace can provide to those who have no merit. Paul had already showed that all people, of whatever piety, are without merit, and need a free justification if they are to be saved (*Rom. 3:10-12, 23-25a*). A justification that needs to be completed by the recipient is no resting place.

—The Rev. J. I. Packer, D. Phil. (Oxford)
author of *Knowing God and Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*
from *The Reformation Study Bible*, 2d. ed., p. 1695

THE HUMBLE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

Humility in Scripture does not mean pretending to be worthless and refusing positions of responsibility, but knowing and keeping the place God has appointed for one. Being humble is a matter of accepting God's arrangement, whether it means the high exposure of leadership (Moses was humble as a leader, Num. 12:3), or the obscurity of being a servant., When Jesus said the He was "lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29), He meant that He was following the Father's plan for His earthly life.

The three Persons of the Trinity are eternal and self-existent, having equally all aspects and attributes of deity, and always acting together. But the Persons are distinct in their mutual relationships. Something of what this means is revealed in the humble submission of Christ to the Father's will, and also in the way that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to confirm the work of salvation in human hearts.

The Father's will for Christ is sometimes called the covenant of redemption. It is called a "covenant" because it is an agreement between two parties. *The Westminster Confession* summarizes the agreement (the Father's purpose, accepted by the Son) as follows:

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only-begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of His Church, the Heir of all things and Judge of the world: unto whom He did, from all eternity, give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified (*Westminster Confession*, VIII.1).

Christ fulfilled this covenant through two stages called His "humiliation" and His "exaltation." In His humiliation, He left behind the eternal glory that was His . . .

—The Rev. J. I. Packer, D.Phil. (Oxford)
author of *Knowing God and Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*
from *The Reformation Study Bible*, 2d. ed., p. 1519

THE DUPLEX GRATIA: THE GOSPEL'S DOUBLE GRACE

One of the most remarkable statements in the Bible is Ephesians 1:3. There we are told that "in Christ," God has blessed his people with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." "*Every* spiritual blessing," nothing lacking, is the present possession of everyone who is savingly united to Jesus Christ. There is no truth more basic and more profound in the gospel.

No one has better expressed the significance of this than John Calvin. Calvin taught that by his death and resurrection Christ procured for his people a "double grace" (*duplex gratia*) . . . Calvin makes plain that both justification (being "reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness") and sanctification (the cultivation "of blamelessness and purity of life") are two aspects of the one gift of Christ. The spiritual simultaneity in Christ of the *duplex gratia*.

—From Ian Hamilton's *The Gospel-Shaped Life* (2017), pp. 16-17

JOHN CALVIN ON THE NECESSITY FOR REFORMING THE CHURCH
More than 450 years ago, a request came to John Calvin to write on the character of and need for reform in the Church. The circumstances were quite different from those that inspired other writings of Calvin, and enable us to see other dimensions of his defense of the Reformation. The Emperor Charles V was calling the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire to meet in the city of Speyer in 1544. Martin Bucer, the great reformer of Strassburg, appealed to Calvin to draft a statement of the doctrines of and necessity for the Reformation. The result was remarkable. Theodore Beza, Calvin’s friend and successor in Geneva, called *The Necessity for Reforming the Church* the most powerful work of his time . . .

... Calvin focuses on four topics, which he calls the soul and body of the church. The soul of the church is worship and salvation. The body is sacraments and church government. The great cause of reform for Calvin centers in these topics. The evils, remedies and necessity for prompt action all relate to worship, salvation, sacraments and church government.

... Proper worship is Calvin’s first concern.

WORSHIP
Calvin stresses the importance of worship because human beings so easily worship according to their own wisdom rather than God’s. He insists that worship must be regulated by the Word of God alone: “I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honour of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct, ‘Obedience is better than sacrifice.’” This conviction is one of the reasons that reform was required: “ . . . since . . . God in many passages forbids any new worship unsanctioned by his Word; since he declares that he is grievously offended with the presumption which invents such worship, and threatens it with severe punishment, it is clear that the reformation which we have introduced was demanded by a strong necessity.” . . .

For Calvin the worship of the medieval church had become “gross idolatry.” The issue of idolatry was for him as serious as the issue of works righteousness in justification. Both represented human wisdom replacing divine revelation. Both represented a pandering to human proclivities, rather than desiring to please and obey God . . .

The reformers, like the prophets of old, needed to attack the idolatry and the “external show” of the worship of their time. The antidote to the theatrics of the church in Calvin’s day was a godly simplicity of worship — as reflected in the order of service in the church of Geneva . . .

—The Rev. W. Robert Godfrey, Ph.D. (Stanford)

From www.Ligonier.org, July 8, 2016

*Westminster’s worship service follows Calvin’s 1542 order of service.

THE SESSION
Sean W. T. McGowan, Moderator
George E. Close
Arthur E. Wahl
Brett S. Doster

THE DIACONATE
Christopher J. Colson
Kerry S. Langston
Drew D. McLeod

OUR MINISTER
Sean W. T. McGowan, Pastor

OUR MISSIONARIES
Rev. and Mrs. Allen M. Baker, III, Reformed Evangelistic Fellowship Africa, India and USA
Rev. and Mrs. Ethan P. Brown, Reformed University Fellowship (PCA) University of Illinois
Mr. and Mrs. Juan C. Cardenas, TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission) India
Rev. and Mrs. Jonathan M. Craig, Ministry to State (PCA Mission to North Am.) Tallahassee
Mr. and Mrs. Rodney Davila, Presbyterian Church in America El Salvador
Rev. and Mrs. J. Kelly Jackson, Reformed University Fellowship (PCA) Florida State University
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Stewart, Presbyterian Church in America Japan

OUR MISSION AGENCIES
A Women’s Pregnancy Center Tallahassee
Calvary Home for Children Anderson, SC
Chelsea House, Good Samaritan Network Tallahassee
Good Samaritan Inn for Men, Good Samaritan Network Tallahassee
Gulf Coast Presbytery, Presbyterian Church in America Madison, FL to Mobile, AL
Palmer Home for Children Memphis and Nashville, TN
Pregnancy Center of Gadsden County Havana and Quincy
Pregnancy Help & Information Center Tallahassee
Presbyterian Church in America Retired Ministers and Widows Relief Fund USA

THE ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE-BASED MINISTRY
“What exactly do you mean by ‘ordinary means of grace-based ministry?’” The “ordinary means of grace” are “the Word, sacraments, and prayer.” These are the ordinances given by God with which spiritual life is nurtured. By ordinances we mean spiritual instruments of grace and growth in grace appointed by God in the Bible. So, when we say ordinary means of grace-based ministry, we mean a ministry that focuses on doing the things God says are central to the spiritual health and growth of His people. The key things that the church can do to help people know God and grow in their knowledge of God are: (1) the public reading and preaching of the Word; (2) emphasize the confirming efficacy of the sacraments; and (3) emphasize a life of prayer. —The Rev. J. Ligon Duncan, III, Ph.D.

