

# INTRODUCTION

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Our Lord is the Lord who serves. Jesus Christ came into the flesh not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. On the cross He offered Himself as a spotless sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. Through His perfect life and death, He accomplished forgiveness and salvation for all before the Father in heaven. By His empty tomb and ascension into heaven, He declared His victory over sin and death to all the world. Seated now at the Father's right hand, He graciously serves His Church with the gifts of salvation. On the Last Day, He will come again to gather His elect from every nation to celebrate the feast that will have no end.

Our Lord serves us today through His holy Word and Sacraments. Through these means, He comes among us to deliver His forgiveness and salvation, freeing us from our sins and strengthening us for service to one another and to the world. At Holy Baptism, He puts His name upon us, pours His Holy Spirit into our hearts, and rescues us from sin, death, and the devil. Through Holy Absolution, He pronounces His forgiveness again and again. With His holy Word, written in Scripture and preached into our ears, He daily proclaims His abiding love for us through all the joys and sorrows of life in this world. In His Holy Supper, He gives us His own body and blood to eat and drink as a priceless gift to nourish and strengthen us in both body and soul.

The Lord's service calls forth our service—in sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to Him and in loving service to one another. Having been called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we receive His gifts with thankfulness and praise. With psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we joyfully confess all that God has done for us, declaring the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Our song joins with the song of every saint from every age, the new song of Christ's holy people, declaring: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12).

Within the Lutheran tradition, the wedding of the Word of God to melody was modeled by the reformer himself. Martin Luther had a high regard for music and urged the Church to use it wisely as a vehicle for proclaiming the Gospel. "Next to theology," he wrote, "I accord to music the highest place and the greatest honor." Retaining the best of pre-Reformation hymnody, as well as adding a great number of new hymns to the Church's song, Luther and succeeding generations of hymnwriters continue to inspire the faithful to lift their voices in praise and thanksgiving to the triune God.

This heritage of word and song has been highly valued throughout the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Even before the Synod's formation, a new, German-language hymnal was already in development, edited by the Synod's first president, C. F. W. Walther. With the transition to English came several books: *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1889, 1912), *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), and, most recently,

*Lutheran Worship* (1982). Each of these hymnals not only handed on the treasures of the past but also offered contemporary expressions of word and song in service to the Gospel.

*Lutheran Service Book* now continues the Church's song into the twenty-first century. Officially accepted at the Synod's 2004 Convention, *Lutheran Service Book* is a careful blending of the best of *The Lutheran Hymnal* and *Lutheran Worship*. It offers treasured melodies and texts that have nourished God's people for generations.

In every age God also blesses His people by raising up hymnwriters who have honed their craft to create rich and fresh expressions of praise. Produced during the most prolific period of English-language hymn writing in the history of Christendom, *Lutheran Service Book* delivers a rich feast of Gospel-centered hymns from every age and from many lands.

*Lutheran Service Book* is offered with the prayer that it may be used in all its fullness to give voice to the prayer, praise, and thanksgiving of God's holy people as they are graciously served by Him through Word and Sacrament.

#### ABOUT THE COVER

The most prominent feature of the cover design is the cross. The dark, innermost portion of the cross is a reminder of the darkness of Good Friday, when our Lord "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). The prominent, gold leaf cross is a reminder of the resurrection of our Lord. God raised Him "from the dead and gave Him glory, so that [our] faith and hope are in God" (1 Peter 1:21). The eight embossed squares surrounding the cross remind us of Christ's resurrection on Sunday, the eighth day, and the inauguration of a new creation through our Baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Taken as a whole, the cross design gives the impression of ongoing expansion—even as the Gospel continues to be proclaimed until the end of time "in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

To the left of the cross are depicted the means of grace, through which the Gospel goes forth into our lives and to all the world. From top to bottom are an open Bible (Word of God), a shell with drops of water (Holy Baptism), and Communion vessels with grains of wheat and fruit of the vine (Lord's Supper). On the back cover, the Holy Trinity is pictured in the form of the "hand of God" (the Father), a cross (the Son), and a dove (the Holy Spirit).