

Worship 101: The Introit

We continue this month in our series, Worship 101, with the next part of our Divine Service after the confession and absolution, the Introit. The word “introit” (pronounced in-trow-it) comes from the Latin and literally means, “he enters in.” The reason we know about the introit and its origins is because of a fourth century nun who wrote down what took place when Christians gathered for a church service at that time.

In the fourth century Christianity was finally legalized by the Roman emperor, Constantine (313 AD). Prior to this the Christian faith was banned. At this time church buildings were constructed; before this the church would gather in homes.

As people would come for worship on a Sunday morning, the man up front, known as a Cantor, would lead them in the singing of a responsive psalm. As they waited for the building to fill up with people and for the clergy to arrive, the Cantor would lead the congregation in the chanting of selected psalms. At this point in church history there were no pews so the people would be standing. After a while the clergy would arrive. To let the people know that the clergy were ready to enter the nave a cross or crucifix was placed on a long pole (a crucifer) which was held up in the air. The people singing the psalms would see the crucifer and open up a way there in the crowd for the acolytes, pastors and others to walk up to the altar to begin the church service. This is where we get the name introit: “he enters in”. The clergy would be allowed “to enter into” the nave so they could lead the congregation in the Divine Service.

We in the Lutheran church continue this tradition with our use of the introit. Our introit consists of the chanting of a portion of a psalm that fits well with the theme of the day. This past Sunday was the first Sunday in Lent. The Gospel for this day is Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. The introit for the day is from a portion of Psalm 91 which the devil used to try and tempt Jesus into sin.

At the end of the introit in parenthesis is what is called the Antiphon. The word antiphon means “to sound again.” That which is repeated in the introit is the theme verse or verses of the psalm. In this psalm verses 15-16 are sung at the beginning and then repeated at the conclusion. Just before the end of the introit what is known as the “Gloria Patri” is sung. This is Latin for “Glory be to the Father” which is how this begins. The Glori Patri is a verse of praise to the Triune God. The “it” as in, “as **it** was in the beginning” refers to the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As with the other parts of our Divine Service, the introit goes back in time many, many centuries, before there even was a Roman Catholic Church. It helps to connect us with Christians who lived hundreds of years before.

One final thought: Sometimes Christians from other denominations criticize us Lutherans because we sing the psalms. We’re considered to be to “Roman Catholic” or just plain strange for doing this. We however take comfort in the fact that not only did the ancient church sing the psalms, so also did the Christians of the first century. In fact we are told in the Bible to sing the psalms. In Colossians 3:16 the apostle Paul writes: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you **SING PSALMS**, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” In addition, the psalms were written not to be read but to be sung. The book of psalms was the hymn book of Old Testament Israel.

So also we continue this tradition with our singing of a psalm in the introit. Something the church has done for almost 2,000 years.

In Christ,
Pastor Bloom