



St. John's

Episcopal Church



**understanding
worship**



Come as you are
Engage in faith

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to St. John's Episcopal Church. This booklet is designed to help familiarize you with worship in the Episcopal Church. The goal is to give the reader a basic understanding of the customs and traditions of our common worship. If you are a visitor, please know you are most welcome. We understand that our liturgical practices may be unfamiliar to visitors so please feel free to participate in whatever way you feel comfortable. If you have any questions, please ask one of the clergy, one of the ushers, or any of our regular members.

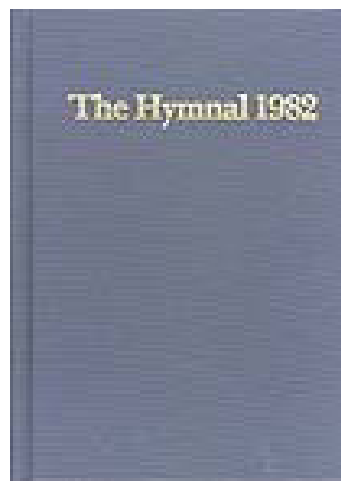
PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

In the Episcopal Church people have various traditions for how to prepare themselves to worship. You will most likely find people kneeling in prayer or sitting quietly. Whatever your personal practice is, the goal is to prepare ourselves to come into the presence of God.

The service for worship on Sunday is laid out in the service bulletin. The service typically follows Holy Eucharist Rite I or Rite II found on pages 323 and 355 of the red **Book of Common Prayer**. Music for the service can be found in the blue **Hymnal**.



Book of Common Prayer



Hymnal

UNDERSTANDING THE WORSHIP SERVICE

The Episcopal Church worships God in both word and sacrament. Therefore, our service is divided into two parts beginning with **The Liturgy of the Word** and culminating in **Holy Communion**.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The Entrance Hymn and Procession

In The Episcopal Church the service usually begins with a hymn during which the ministers process into the church. The procession signifies the journey of the soul to God for “they will climb from height to height, and the God of gods will reveal himself in Zion” (*Psalm 84:6*). The Procession is led by a cross. Some people choose to follow the custom of bowing as the cross passes by their pew. The cross leads the procession because it is the symbol of the triumph of the Church and because we follow Jesus who, “went forth bearing His Cross” (*John 19:7*). The cross is often flanked by two torches for those who go with Christ, “shall not walk in darkness” (*John 8:12*).

The Collect for Purity

A collect is a prayer. This opening prayer is one in which the priest, on behalf of the congregation, asks God to cleanse them and prepare them for worship.

The Song of Praise

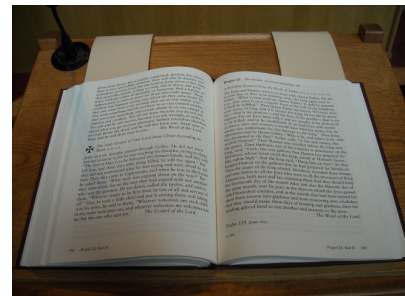
The Gloria, also known as the Angelic Hymn, or Great Doxology, is one of the most ancient hymns in the church. The first sentence are the words the angelic choir sang to the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus. The remaining words were written by St. Hilary of Poitiers around the year 350 AD. Sometimes this hymn is replaced by a similar song of praise.

The Collect of the Day

A prayer is dedicated to every Sunday of the liturgical year. It is meant to sum up or “collect” the idea expressed in the readings and theme for the service. These prayers can be found on pages 159-261 of the **Book of Common Prayer**.

The Lessons and Psalm

The lessons and psalm read during the service come from a lectionary designed to coordinate with the church year. The church year loosely follows the life of Christ. The lectionary is called the Revised Common Lectionary. This lectionary is shared by a number of Christian denominations including: The Lutheran Church, The Presbyterian Church, The Catholic Church, The United Methodist Church, The American Baptist Church, and The Church of England.



The Gospel Reading

To read the gospel is to proclaim the words of Christ. When used in this way, the gospel is only to be read by a deacon or priest. This is the high point of The Liturgy of the Word.



The Sermon

The sermon or homily is common to most Christian services. In the Episcopal Church the sermon is typically shorter than in most protestant services as we believe it should not overshadow Holy Communion, which is the pinnacle of the worship service.

The Nicene Creed

Developed by the entire Christian church in the year 325 A.D. the Nicene Creed spells the basic beliefs of the Christian faith. For this reason it is recited on Sundays and on other major celebrations.

Prayers of the People

During the Prayers of the People we lift our prayers to God as a congregation. The forms we use for prayer are found on pages 383-395 of the **Book of Common Prayer**.

The Confession

The General Confession usually follows the Prayers of the People. The confession is a time for us to reflect on our own sin and ask for God's forgiveness. It is placed here before the Holy Communion so that each person may examine themselves before participating. *Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. (1 Cor. 11:28)*

The Absolution

In general, Episcopalians hold that one may receive absolution of one's sins both through the pardon of a priest (who is Christ's representative) or through repentance confessed to God alone. However, in order to ensure the believer receives the sacrament in a worthy manor (*1 Cor. 11:28-29*), the absolution is given to all assembled.

The Peace

The passing of the peace is also a sign of obedience to Jesus' words that we make peace with one another before offering our gifts at the altar (*Matt. 5:23-24*). It is also a custom that dates back to the earliest liturgies of the church and can be found in the writings of Justin Martyr (140 A.D.) who indicates that during the second century, the peace took place before the presentation of the gifts at the Eucharist.



Announcements

Announcements about any activities or upcoming events at St. John's generally occur at this point in the service; between the Liturgy of the Word and The Holy Communion.

HOLY COMMUNION



Holy Communion, Holy Eucharist, The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, or The Lord's Supper are all terms for the part of the service of worship in which Christians are following the command of Christ given at the Last Supper to eat and drink of His body and blood. Whenever Christians eat of the bread and drink of the cup we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (*See: Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, John 13, and 1 Corinthians 11.*)

The Offertory

The Offertory is the rite by which the bread and wine are presented (offered) to God before they are consecrated. As the altar is being set, a hymn or anthem is generally sung by the choir. During this time the alms basin is passed and the congregation places their monetary offering in it to be presented to the church.

The Sursum Corda

This section of the liturgy covers the introductory words of the Eucharist found on page 361 of the **Book of Common Prayer**.

The Proper Preface

After the introductory words the celebrant continues with the words at the bottom of page 361 by inserting a Proper Preface. The words change depending on the liturgical season or type of service. They can be found on pages 377-382 of the **Book of Common Prayer**.

The Sanctus and Benediction

Sanctus is the Latin word for *Holy*. These words, found in the second paragraph on page 362, are often sung but may be said as well. The first two sentences are the Sanctus and are adapted from Isaiah 6:3, which describes the prophet Isaiah's vision of the throne of God surrounded by six-winged, ministering seraphim. A similar representation may be found in Revelation 4:8. The last section describes Jesus' Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem.

The Sanctus Bells



The use of bells in scripture dates back to the time of the Exodus when the high priest would wear bells on his garments in his service in the tabernacle. Since then bells have been rung for church services in a number of ways.

The Sanctus bells are rung as both a symbol of the angels in heaven bowing during the hymn of the Sanctus and to help focus the attention of the congregation during important moments of the service. The bells are rung before the words of institution and during the consecration of the elements to signify Christ's presence on the altar. They are also rung as in invitation to come to the altar and receive the sacrament.

Understanding Communion

While Eucharistic theology can be very complicated, the easiest way of understanding Communion is that the Eucharist is celebrated as a way of giving thanksgiving and praise to God. This is the primary definition of the term "Eucharist". We praise and thank God for His great love for us manifested in many ways, but especially in the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Eucharist is also a reliving of the Last Supper where Jesus established a new covenant with His church. In all versions of the Eucharist we recall the exact words Christ spoke during this event (*1 Cor. 11*). In this memorial we remember and proclaim Jesus' sacrifice for our sins including His death, burial, and His resurrection from the dead.



The Eucharist is also the way in which Christ's sacrifice is made present for us. It is not another sacrifice, but a reliving of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. It is as if the barriers of space and time are removed and we are present at His once for all sacrifice on Calvary. In this sacrifice of praise, we are united with Christ and offer ourselves to God; being made holy and acceptable by Christ's grace. In this, we are all united with one another in Christ.

The Eucharist is also a means by which Christ is made present to us. God is omnipresent, meaning He is present everywhere and at all times, but He is especially present in the person of Jesus Christ through the Eucharist. In Communion, Christ's body and blood are present in the bread and wine through a divine mystery.

The results of the Eucharist are many. Through it, we are strengthened in our union with Christ and His church. Much in the same way food nourishes our physical body, the Eucharist nourishes our soul. It enables us to grow in faith and overcome sin. It strengthens our heart to love our neighbor and our enemy. The Eucharist is a foretaste of the great marriage supper of the Lamb foretold in the New Testament book of Revelation, when we will see Christ face to face.

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer, also known as the Our Father or Pater Noster, is probably the best-known prayer in Christianity. Two versions of it occur in the New Testament; one in the Gospel of Matthew 6:9–13, as a section of the Sermon on the Mount, and the other in the Gospel of Luke 11:2–4. The prayer is particularly fitting at this point in the Eucharist as it allows us to pray in the words our Lord taught us, asking Him for our daily bread, which we are about to receive, and again asking for forgiveness of our sins before partaking of this Holy Sacrament.

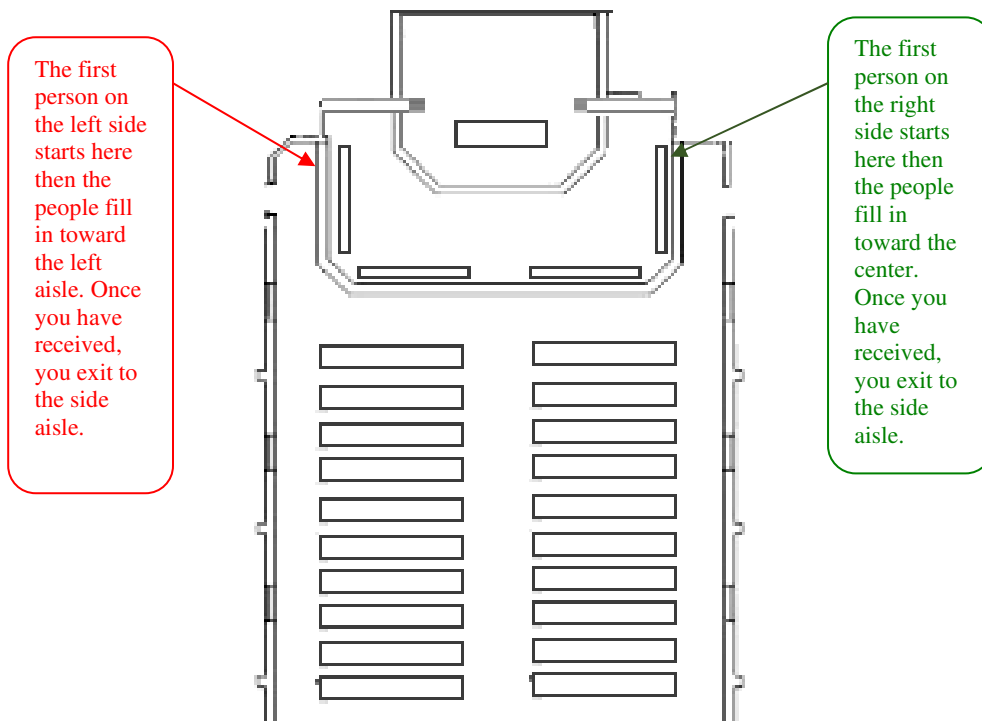
The Fraction

The Fraction is the ceremonial act of breaking the consecrated bread. It is a direct connection to the action of Jesus breaking the bread in the Last Supper. Some ancient biblical manuscripts use the words, “This is my body which was ‘broken’ for you,” as opposed to “given for you” (*1Cor. 11:24*). This suggests the breaking of the bread can be seen as a symbol for Christ’s body being ‘broken’ on the cross. However, this action should only be seen as symbolic of Jesus’ suffering since the Gospels stress the point that none of Christ’s bones were literally broken during his crucifixion.





How to Receive Communion

Before we receive communion it is appropriate to prepare ourselves by confessing our sin and receiving absolution as was done either in the confession and absolution or just previously in the Lord’s Prayer. It is also appropriate to approach with our hearts humbled and in a state of prayer and openness to the Spirit of God in our lives.

If you would like to come to the altar to receive communion, simply follow the usher’s instructions. They will instruct you when it is time to go forward. In general, you simply approach the altar and kneel (or stand if you are unable to kneel) at the altar rail when it is your turn. *See below.*



Once you are at the altar, you should then indicate to the ministers whether you would like to receive the bread, the wine, or simply a blessing. *See below.*

How to Receive Communion	
To receive the bread dipped in wine.	
To receive a blessing only (no bread or wine)	
To receive the bread alone and / or to drink from the chalice	
To receive gluten free bread, just ask the priest.	

Post Communion Prayer

We partake in the Eucharist and are spiritually nourished, but it is not for our benefit alone. Communion enables us to return to the world with renewed vigor for proclaiming the Gospel in our words and in our lives. In the Eucharist, Christ's presence both nourishes us and challenges us. The Eucharist is therefore not an exclusive gathering that separates us from the world, but a challenge to reach out beyond our own church to the world around us. In this prayer, we are reminding ourselves of this fact and asking God for His help to do these things.

The Blessing

At the conclusion of the Eucharist the priest blesses the congregation. This gesture did not come into practice in the church until the late Middle Ages. However, blessings are common in all parts of the Bible as the authoritative announcement of God's favor. Since we have just partaken of the body and blood of Christ, it seems an appropriate place for the priest to bless the congregation.

The Closing Hymn

At the end of the service a closing hymn is sung during which the choir and other ministers process to the rear of the nave.

The Dismissal

The last words of the service are pronounced by a member of the clergy. There are a variety of dismissals and they can be found on page 366 of [The Book of Common Prayer](#). All of them remind us to take what we have gained in the worship of our Lord into the world.

After the Service

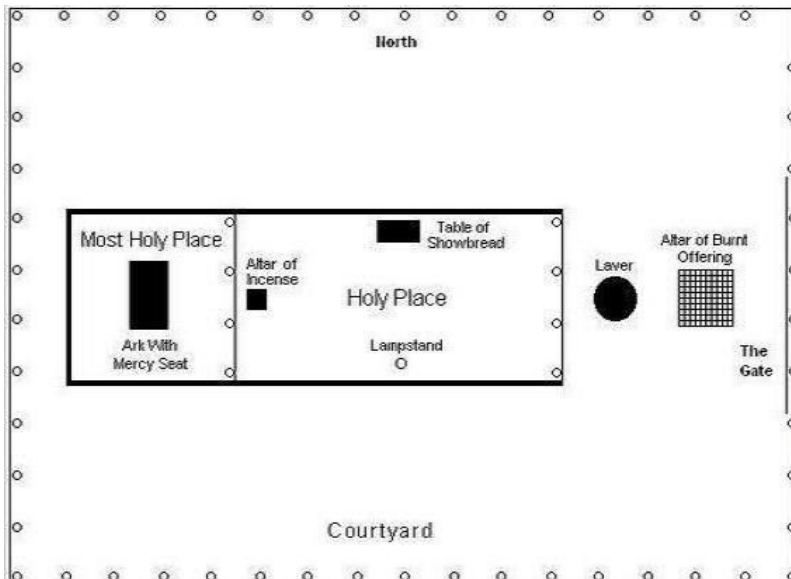
Depending on which service you attend there may be a gathering of people for coffee and conversation. There may also be a Christian education or other offerings. Please see one of the ushers who can point you or your child in the right direction. If you are new, please feel free to introduce yourself to one of our clergy.

BASIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The Design of the Worship Space

The Church building represents the Ark or ship of the Lord. The roof of the church nave even looks like the hull of a ship turned upside down. The Nave, (the place where the pews are located) the Chancel (the area where communion is received), and Sanctuary (the area around the altar) correspond to the Court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies of the Jewish temple (see below).

The baptismal font is located in the rear of the church, which corresponds to the Laver of the Jewish temple used for washing and making one pure. The font's placement in our tradition also represents the souls journey to God which begins in baptism at the entrance and is carried to be fed at the altar in ones live then moves beyond to the presence of God.



A diagram of the ancient Jewish Tabernacle, created from instructions given to Moses by God.

What is the **Book of Common Prayer**

The **Book of Common Prayer** contains the ceremonies and rites of the Episcopal Church by which we structure our worship. The **Book of Common Prayer** has been revised multiple times over the last several hundred years. It is based on the original Prayer Book crafted by Thomas Cranmer in 1549 which used the ancient traditions of the Church and the monastic offices as its source. Most of the language of the current Prayer Book comes from Holy Scripture or is derived from prayers which date to some of the earliest days of the church.

What are the different kinds of vestments?

In general, vestments also date back to the earliest days of the church and are used to cover regular dress minimizing individual appearance while presenting an orderly and unified appearance. Vestments also serve the purpose of identifying who is serving in what role during the service. You will notice that the choir is vested in a black cassock covered by a white surplice. In a similar way, the acolytes wear white albs to identify them apart from the choir. The clergy wear a colored stole around their neck and, if they are celebrating the Eucharist, a colored chasuble.

The Stole represents the yoke of Christ

The Surplice symbolizes purity

The Cassock symbolizes devotion.



The Chasuble represents the garments worn by Christ on Good Friday.

Why do the clergy wear different color vestments from one Sunday to the next?

The color of the vestments of the clergy, the frontal on the altar, and the lectern hangings change depending on the seasons of the church.

Advent = Blue

Christmas = White

Ordinary Time = Green

Lent = Purple

Easter = White or Gold

Pentecost = Red

Blue = Hope

White = Joy

Green = Hope

Purple = Penitence

Red = The Fire of the Holy Spirit

Why is there an altar?

The altar, or holy table, is the central focus of the worship space and serves as a reminder that Christ's death on the cross was a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It also represents Mount Calvary, where Our Lord was offered for the sins of the world. The altar also serves as an appropriate place for us to offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving as we participate with the one true sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Why are there candles?

Traditionally, candles were used simply for the practical illumination of the areas which are used in the service. Today, with the use of electric lights, their meaning is more symbolic as they are used to illuminate those objects which are considered holy. The two large candles on the altar or “Eucharistic Lights” represent Christ’s divine and human natures. A beautiful meaning attached to the candles in general when used in worship is that the wax, which comes from the virgin bee, symbolizes our Lord’s body born from the Virgin Mary, the wick His soul, the flame His divinity; thus setting forth the Mystery of the Incarnation.

Why are there flowers?

The flowers are used to honor our Lord and symbolically show that he is “The Rose of Sharon and The Lili of the Valley” (*Song of Solomon 2:1*).

Why is incense used at times?

Incense typifies the Merits of Christ and the Prayers of the Saints (*Revelation 5*). It is of divine authority and has always been associated with the worship of both the Jewish and Christian Church. The Bible says, “In every place incense shall be offered unto my name and a pure offering” (*Malachi 1:11*).

When do I stand / sit / kneel?

While these customs have changed over the years and vary from service to service, typically one stands to praise, sits to learn, and kneels to pray. Just watch the people around you and follow their cues. The clergy may also indicate when you are to stand, sit, or kneel.

What do I have to do to become a member?

If you are interested in joining the church please fill out one of the cards on the back of the pew and place it in the alms basin when it is passed by and we will contact you about membership. For more information, please pick up visitor material located at the tables outside the entrance of the nave (worship area).

Visitor Card



**ST. JOHN'S
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH**

WELCOME!

We are pleased you chose to join us today at St. John's. If you are seeking a church home, we joyfully welcome you into our church community. If you are just visiting today, we extend God's blessing to you.

Please introduce yourself to one of our clergy so we may have the opportunity to begin to get to know you.

Blessings,
The Rev. Peter M. Floyd
Rector

Please complete this card (*front and back*) and place in the offering plate or give it to an Usher.

Date: _____

About you and/or your family:
Name _____
Address _____
Phone: (home) _____
Phone: (cell) _____
Email _____
Names/ages of children _____

Service attended (please circle):
7:30am 8:45am 11:15am 5:00pm

Who/what brought you to St. John's? _____

I am: ☐ New to the area ☐ A first time visitor
☐ A repeat visitor ☐ Just passing through
☐ Looking for a church home



What is baptism?

Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as His children and makes us members of Christ's body, the Church, and inheritors of the Kingdom of God. In Baptism our sins are forgiven, we receive the Holy Spirit, and are grafted into the Church.

Why are infants baptized?

Infants are baptized so they can share citizenship in the Covenant, membership in Christ, and redemption by God.

A WORD ON PERSONAL PIETY

As you participate in the service you may notice people making various religious gestures or movements at certain points in the service. In general, these are simply expressions of reverence based on custom; similar to the tradition of placing your hand over your heart during the singing of the national anthem. You may choose to do some, all, or none of them based on your personal piety and level of comfort. Below is an explanation of the most common of these practices.

Bowing for the Processional Cross

As the processional cross passes, many people choose to bow as a sign of reverence. This gesture derives from the manors of the medieval court where one would bow as a member of the royal family passes. Here we are bowing to our true Lord, Christ the King.

Bowing Before the Altar

In a similar way, just as one would bow before the throne of a monarch, many choose to bow to the reserved sacrament located behind the altar as they enter and leave the church and/or each time they pass before it.



The Reserved Sacrament

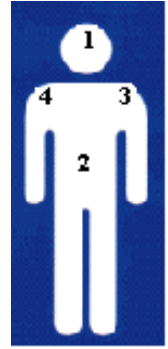
A portion of the consecrated bread and wine is reserved in a small box behind the altar. It should only be accessed by ordained clergy and is a reminder that Christ is always present in the sanctuary. A white candle is also kept burning so that the people will be reminded of the presence of the consecrated bread and wine. The only time the candle is not burning and the body and blood of Christ are absent is the time from the stripping of the altar on Maundy Thursday until the Easter Vigil.

Crossing One's Self

The sign of the cross is a liturgical gesture because the cross is the central symbol of the Christian faith. To make the sign of the cross is to recall the salvation that God made available through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is therefore both a reminder to ourselves and a proclamation to others of the divine love which is not only found in a past event but continues to be with us.

In general, people cross themselves when they are blessed, or when the Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) is invoked. The gesture may also be made at other points during the service.

To cross yourself you use your right hand and place your thumb and first two fingers together (symbolizing the Trinity) and touch your head, abdomen, left shoulder, then right shoulder.



Crossing During the Gospel

When the priest says the introductory sentence before the gospel reading many people choose to make a small cross with their thumb on their forehead, lips, and heart. This is a reminder to us to keep the gospel in our mind, on our lips, and in our heart.



Genuflecting

Some people choose to genuflect (bow on one knee) before going to the altar during communion. Although personal customs vary widely, in general, one genuflects on their right knee when the consecrated bread and wine are exposed, and on their left knee when receiving a blessing from a bishop.

Bowing at the Name of Jesus

Philippians 2:10 says, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." From this verse comes a somewhat less common custom of bowing at the waist or nodding one's head every time Jesus' name is mentioned in the service.

Bowing During the Nicene Creed

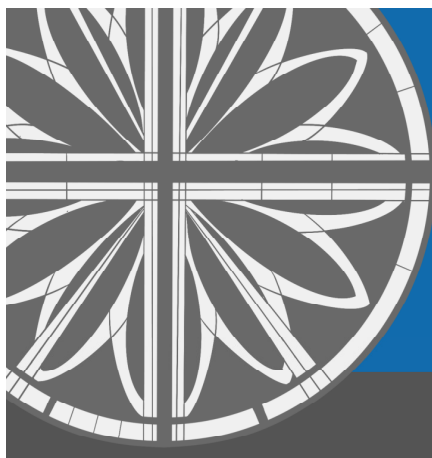
Since the twelfth century there has been the custom to genuflect or bow at the waist during the mention of the Incarnation in the Nicene Creed. This was most likely in response to certain heresies at the time that were denying the divinity of Christ. The custom is less common today but still a wonderful way of remembering the sacred mystery of Christ's birth.

About the Daily Office

At its earliest age, Christians began to keep regular forms of daily prayer in both the morning and the evening. Later, in the monasteries of the medieval church, these forms of worship became more complex and increased in frequency to include seven different services: Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. The point of this devotion was to grow in holiness by being present with God and to sanctify time, which belongs to God, by keeping these services at specific hours of the day. After the Protestant Reformation, these daily offices were condensed back to two services; Morning and Evening Prayer. With the publication of the most current prayer book in 1979 the services of Sext (Noonday Prayer) and Compline were restored for optional use.

Many people choose to keep the Daily Office privately as a spiritual discipline. When you do so, you are joining in with the corporate prayers of Christians all over the world who are praying at the same moment. If you would like to keep the Daily Office you have a few options. First, set apart a time (or times) of day for God. Once you have done this, you can use your Prayer Book and a Bible to keep Morning and/or Evening Prayer. Simply follow the services in the Prayer Book paying attention to the rubrics (instructions) in italicized words. The lectionary for the Daily Office can be found in the back of the Prayer Book on pages 933-1001.

Since the lectionary can be a bit of a challenge, you may want to pick up a copy of *Forward Day by Day* which gives you the readings for the day along with a reflection on these passages. This publication is available in the hallway outside of the office.



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Engage in faith



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