

The Lamb's High Feast

Introduction

It's almost certain that our Church's most distinctive feature is our Liturgy of worship. Each and every week we partake of Holy Communion using a centuries old Prayer Book containing liturgies that are thousands of years old. What's more, we conduct our services in buildings carefully designed according to specific architectural principles which haven't changed since before the advent of Christ. We sing music composed hundred's if not thousands of years ago, using instruments that are never heard on the radio. For the uninitiated visitor, it must be a bit overwhelming. Even for those of us who are accustomed to Liturgy, Anglican worship can be baffling.

We should all ask ourselves, why? Why worship this way? Is it necessary. What purpose is served by maintaining these traditions? Where did these traditions come from and why do we continue them? Has worship always been the way it is in our Liturgy? Should it continue the same forever?

Perhaps the most important question to answer concerning the liturgy is this one: Is the Liturgy of our Church truly Biblical? In other words, does our liturgy have the Bible as its source and does our Liturgy fulfill the intent of Holy Scripture?

I am convinced that the answer is a resounding yes! Our liturgy flows from the precepts of Scripture, is filled with the words of Scripture, is permeated by the content of Scripture and is faithful to the intentions of Scripture.

“The Lamb's High Feast” is a journey through our Liturgy of the Holy Communion, revealing all the ways our peculiar form of worship is a perfect and holy fulfillment of Scripture in worship.

Where on Earth did we get our idea's about worship?

All the traditions of Christianity find their origin and their initial explanation in the Old Testament. To answer questions about the foundation of our worship and liturgy, we must follow the the ancient Hebrews, descendants of Abraham, into the middle eastern desert.

After 400 years in captivity to the Egyptians, the Hebrews are miraculously delivered from their bondage and proceed through the Red Sea to the base of a mountain. God himself awaits them at the top of that mountain. The event of their encounter with God is recorded in beginning in Exodus 19:



Exodus 19:1 On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone forth out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 And when they set out from Reph'idim and came into

the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain. 3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain,

Through Moses, God instructed the people to consecrate themselves in preparation for His presence. So the people fasted and prayed for three days. Exodus 19:16 continues –

16 On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. 18 And Mount

Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19 And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. 20 And the LORD came down upon Mount

Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

Continuing in Exodus 24:15

15 Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain.
16 The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days;

and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. 17 Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. 18 And Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

The rest of the Book of Exodus is a detailed account of all the things God showed Moses during those forty days and forty nights. When we remember this story, we usually concentrate on how Moses brought down from the mountain two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments. Or perhaps we focus on how the Israelites spent the forty days making a golden calf idol which they began to worship. But most of Exodus is not about either of these two things. Fifteen of the remaining twenty chapters of Exodus record detailed instructions concerning how God is to be worshiped.

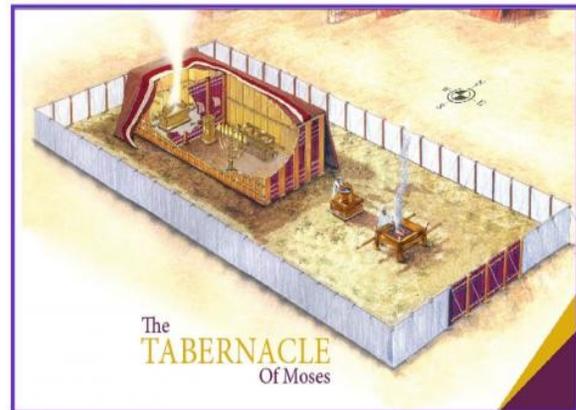
A great collection was taken. The people gave gold, linen, wood, and many of their most valuable possessions which they had plundered from Egypt. Then, using their most talented artisans, they constructed a great tabernacle and all its furnishings: golden lamp stands, tables of a special bread called the “bread of the presence” (shewbread), special robes for the priests, and many other ornaments. The tabernacle itself was divided into three distinct rooms: a large gathering room, and a smaller area where the priests would do their work and the smallest area, called the Holies Place (the holy of holies) which contained the ark of the covenant, itself the throne where God would sit enthroned among his people.

Does this description sound familiar? Compare this to the design of a Christian Church with its Nave (Outer Court), Chancel (Holy Place) and Altar (Holiest Place).

Why did Moses pick this design? Why did he instruct the Hebrews to build this building with these furnishings? And why do we still mimic these designs in our buildings and liturgies today?

The answer to these questions is found in the New Testament, in the book of the Hebrews. In the 8th chapter we read:

5 [The priests of the Old Covenant] serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God,



saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”

When God came down to the top of Mount Sinai, the smoke and fire and clouds and earthquakes marked the spot where heaven and earth touched. When Moses climbed the mountain and entered the cloud, he was allowed to stand at the opening to heaven and gaze in. After forty days and forty nights

gazing into the realm of God, Moses was commanded to leave the mountain and build a replica of heaven on earth. The worship, liturgy building, furnishings, priesthood, songs, sacrifices and instructions all served this purpose. The worship of the Hebrews was not from this earth. It was a copy of the worship of heaven.

Some will object, “yes that may be true of the Old Testament times, but Christ abolished all that Old Testament ritual when he died on the cross.” But did he really abolish the worship of heaven? Or did he transform the worship of earth to be a better copy of the heavenly worship?

The Book of Revelation is the record of a vision which St. John, the Apostle had while an old man exiled to the island of Patmos. It begins this way,

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; 14 his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; 16 in his right hand he held seven stars,

from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

19 Now write what you see,

continuing in chapter 4

After this I looked, and lo, in heaven an open door! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this.” 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and lo, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne! ...

For the remainder of the Book of Revelation John writes for us what he saw of the worship of God as it is in heaven – of the great liturgy of the Angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. He describes the songs they sing, the robes they wear, the furnishings that surround them. St. John describes processions and choirs and building dimensions as well as the exquisite beauty of heaven.



St. John's descriptions of the heavenly Liturgy makes several things very clear. The worship of heaven which John records is the same which Moses witnessed. The difference is only this: John new Jesus. He had been to the mount of transfiguration, the sacrifice of calvary, and the empty tomb. He witnessed the ascension of Christ into heaven. What for Moses was unfathomable shadow was for John brightly obvious. Moses saw a table of bread which was also the very presence of God. John, who had been present at the Last Supper, saw Jesus the Bread of Heaven, slain from the foundation of the world, and present in his own body upon the Altar.

Moses glimpsed a hazy view of a kingdom of priests in the midst of angels offering sacrifices to God. But John recognized as a universe of living beings, angels, and saints streaming from all nations to participate in the wedding feast of the Lamb, the great high feast of heaven.

Where on earth did we get ideas about worship? No where on earth. Christian worship is the worship of heaven. It is not our own invention, it is our participation in realities far greater than our senses can perceive. We do not worship as any man has decided. We worship as the Spirit of God has revealed it to be. Our liturgy is the practical outworking of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Each week there is a line we repeat in our worship. Near the climax of our worship the priest intones, "therefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we forever sing this hymn to declare the glory of your name."

That phrase expresses the very essence, the heart, soul and mind of Christian worship. Our worship is not of this world. Our worship begins in and rises to heaven.

Let us Pray (taken from the Collect for the Feast of the Ascension)

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe thy only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend *in the Liturgy and the sacraments*, and with him continually dwell, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Looking Ahead to Lesson 2

Spiritual Realities for Material Beings

The Biblical Basis for Sacramental Worship

Are Sacraments real? Does God really choose to use material things to convey spiritual realities? Is a sacramental world view the Biblical world view?

Read Ahead:

Genesis 2:4-3:24 – consider the sacramental nature of the two famous trees in eden. Why was it necessary for Adam and Eve to leave Eden? How is this sacramental?

Exodus 12:1-13 Is there any real or spiritual benefit to eating the Lamb and putting its blood upon the doorpost? Did God offer any other way to receive those benefits?

1 Corinthians 11:17-32 Is there any spiritual benefit or danger to partaking in the Lord's supper? What happens to those who eat the bread unworthily?

