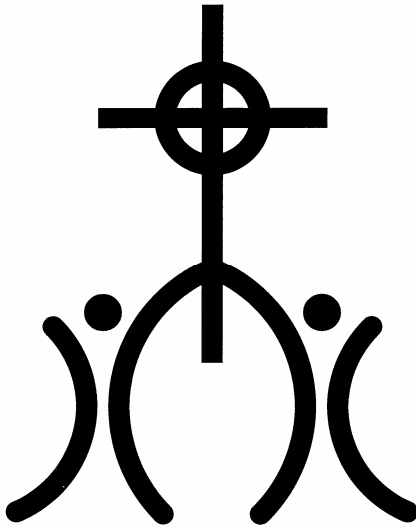


WORSHIP
at
sardis baptist



“where church means people”

2003

Introduction

Worship at Sardis Baptist Church is Christian, congregational and Baptist. These three words summarize the theology of our worship services. Each word touches on a faith heritage hundreds of years old and at the same time gives witness to the reforming aspects of Christianity and the evolution of Christian worship.

Christian

To say that our worship is Christian is saying more than the fact that we pray in Jesus' name, place crosses in our sanctuary and read from the Christian New Testament. The *way* we worship is Christian. Much of this way grew out of the Judaic tradition of worship. Jesus and his disciples were all Jewish and the first Christian churches were comprised mainly by Jewish-Christians.

Christian worship is a corporate event. We worship together, as a congregation. We don't go to a shrine in a temple to individually bow and pray. We come together as a community to worship. Jesus told his disciples that where two or three gathered in his name, there he was also. This doesn't mean that God's presence is not with us when we are by ourselves. Instead, it was an affirmation of corporate worship, by a community of believers.

Community worship is important to at least two reasons. Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. The second was like it; to love your neighbor as yourself. Community worship helps us keep in touch with both the vertical (to God) devotion of our faith and the horizontal (to humanity) commitment of our faith.

Secondly, Christianity is to be lived in this world. Christ came to save the world, to redeem it. He didn't come to reject it or run from it. Some faiths view the world

and all things earthly as inferior to spiritual things. Christianity does not. It does state that sin has tainted our earthly existence, but this does not eradicate the goodness of God's creation from the first days of Genesis.

Christianity cannot be fully practiced in a vacuum. To live our faith we have to live it in relationship with others. So, corporate worship, worshiping as a congregation of believers keeps us in practicing our faith in relationship with other people – people who will disagree with us, have different theological beliefs than us, do things that hurt us and so on.

Following the Christian year is another way that our worship is Christian. Even non-liturgical churches observe Christmas and Easter. And all churches that worship on Sundays emphasize Easter. By following the Christian year we annually go through the cycle of Jesus' life, from Bethlehem to Golgotha, as well as the birth and ministry of the Christian church.

A final point about our Christian worship is that it is a two-way street. The Germans use the word *Gottesdienst* for worship. It literally means, "God's service and our service to God." It is an apt way to describe Christian worship. We speak to God – sing hymns, say prayers – and God speaks to us – reading scripture, hearing a sermon or testimony. The Christian faith focuses on the belief that God desires a personal relationship with human beings. Worship is living that out.

Congregational

Our worship at Sardis is congregational. By this I mean not just corporate as noted above. Our worship is driven by the Protestant idea of the priesthood of the believers. It is not a service for and by the clergy with congregational

observers. One of the reforms of the Protestant movement was to return worship to the people, the congregation. We follow in that tradition.

The ministers of our church do function as our worship leaders. However, they do so in such a way as to bring the congregation into the participation of worship.

We are congregational in that the climax of our worship is to hear the word of God and to respond to it in faith. In the Catholic and Orthodox traditions of worship the Eucharist is the climax of worship – to eat the body of Christ. Here the clergy must carry out the ritual properly and the people receive God’s gift in a worthy manner. The clergy do the work and the people receive.

In the Protestant tradition God’s word is read and the clergy work to respond to that word and the congregation works to receive that preached word and respond to God’s message. The congregation must think, discern, respond.

Baptist

We worship in the Baptist heritage. Baptists for 400 years have pursued three ideals in worship: the centrality of scripture, the priesthood of the believers and the eschewing of sacraments.

Baptists emphasize scripture in two ways. First, the pulpit – the place where scripture is read and commentary about scripture is preached – at Sardis it is the central focal point in the sanctuary. Second, the sermon – the preached commentary on scripture – covers a substantial portion of the worship service. Baptists believe that hearing God’s word preached and leaving to act upon God’s word is one of the most important aspects of worship.

The priesthood of believers states that all baptized believers, not just the clergy, have a right and responsibility

to interpret scripture and Spirit as well as serve the church in their area of giftedness. Each person must respond to God's grace, repent, and seek Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Then, and only then, should he or she be baptized. This egalitarian approach to baptism had several implications, namely that if a person is competent to respond to God's saving grace, she or he is competent to interpret other directions of God's word and/or God's Spirit.

Baptists reject the notion of sacraments. A sacrament is an instrument conferring God's saving grace. Baptists believe nothing does that except faith alone. This idea that nothing can transmit grace except faith means that no particular ritual of worship *has* to be done in a Baptist church. Many Baptist churches keep a very simple service because of that. This also means that all acts of worship, including baptism and communion, are symbols for the deeper, inner faith relationship we have with Jesus Christ. At Sardis we use this Baptist freedom as permission to utilize many different rituals to make worship more creative and to visually and verbally symbolize aspects of the Christian faith. If we think it will help our members worship, we will "borrow things" from our sister Christian denominations. We always reserve the right to interpret and explain rituals and acts of worship as we feel led, so as to connect the outward act of worship to the inward experience of faith.

Christian

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

We observe the Christian Year, which is a walk through Jesus' life & the ministry of the Church. Sometimes the sermons will follow the lectionary – a three-year rotation schedule of Bible readings that covers most of the Bible. Each Sunday, the lectionary provides four scripture readings; an Old Testament passage, a Psalm, a Gospel reading and another New Testament lesson. Lectionaries have been used in the Christian Church for nearly a thousand years. Today, lectionary readings are used in most Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, many Presbyterian and some Baptist churches or parishes.

The use of the Christian Year is a simple reminder that as Christians we want to order our lives – our calendars – by events of God's revelation and only secondarily by the secular calendar.

Advent

Advent is the beginning the Christian Year. The word "advent" means coming or arrival, and it marks the four Sundays preceding Jesus' birth, or arrival. Advent is used to spiritually prepare us for Christmas and Jesus' birth. Originally it was six weeks long, patterned after the 40 days of Lent. However, by the 6th century the bishop of Rome shortened it to four weeks.

An Advent Candle is lit each Sunday, marking a theme each week, typically hope, peace, joy and love. Three of the candles are purple, symbolizing Jesus' royal birth. The third of the four candles is pink or rose and signifies the annunciation of Jesus' birth. The candles are usually arranged in a wreath with a large white candle in the center. This Christ candle is lit either on Christmas Eve or

Christmas Day. The lighting of candles emphasizes the Christian belief that Jesus is the “light” of the world.

The Chrismon Tree is covered with symbols or monograms of Jesus Christ. It is a Christ-monogram Tree. The symbols portray Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, eternal reign and trinitarian oneness of God. The white and gold monograms along with the white lights mark Jesus’ purity. The evergreen tree (and other displayed greenery) symbolizes life eternal.

Poinsettias grace our sanctuary the final two weeks of Advent. The red leaf plant and tiny yellow flower remind us of Jesus’ wounds suffered on the cross and his shed blood. For this purpose he was born into the world.

The color of Advent is purple. Purple stands for royalty and Christ was born the King of kings, a son of David. Purple also is a somber, penitent color. Advent is a time to prepare for Jesus’ birth by confessing our sins, receiving God’s forgiveness and turning to live more closely aligned with our Savior and Lord.

Christmas

Christmas (Christ’s Mass), December 25th, was first known to be celebrated in AD 336. It was a couple of more centuries before Christians generally celebrated it. Christmas celebrates Jesus’ birth, God becoming human. There is no information in the Bible that suggests Jesus was born on the 25th day of December. So, no one knows Jesus’ actual birth-day. One theory as to why this date was chosen explains that Christians took over a pagan holiday to the sun – at the time of the winter solstice. Emperor Aurelian in AD 274 instituted a celebration for “The Birthday of the Invincible Sun” on December 25th.

Christians worship the invincible *Son* and would change the holiday within a hundred years.

Christmas is, as the song says, a 12-day celebration. Depending on what day of the week Christmas falls, there may be two Sundays of Christmas. The next day, or “13th day of Christmas,” is Epiphany – the Magi’s visit of the Christ child.

The color of Christmas is white. White symbolizes purity and holiness. It also signifies light. Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

Epiphany

Western Christianity marks January 6th as the day the Wise Men visit the Christ child. Here, we also observe Jesus’ baptism and the beginning of his ministry. Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on this date. Epiphany interestingly predates Christmas. It was noted by Clement of Alexandria in AD 205, who reported that a feast day recognizing Jesus’ baptism (his spiritual birth) had been celebrated by some for decades.

The date may have been chosen from an old myth that great persons die on the date of their conception – their lives in a manner of speaking come “full circle.” Christians in the East (Greek speaking) figured April 6th as the date of the original Good Friday. Following the myth, then, Jesus should have been born on January 6th. Western Christians (Latin speaking) chose December 25th as the date of Jesus’ birth, but compromised with the East and celebrated January 6th as the day the Wise Men visited the Christ child.

The word “epiphany” means manifestation or appearance. The occasion of Jesus’ birth and baptism are

beginning points or manifestations of God's presence with us. The color for the day is white.

The weeks following Epiphany generally focus on Jesus' ministry and teachings. Many liturgical churches refer to these Sundays as "Ordinary Time." At Sardis we use the more traditional language of Sundays after Epiphany. There may be as many as nine or as few as six Sundays after Epiphany, depending on when Easter falls.

The color for the season of Epiphany is green. Green symbolizes growth and life, appropriately marking the growth of Jesus' life and ministry on earth.

The Sunday before Lent, the last after Epiphany, is Transfiguration Sunday. It marks the occasion of Jesus' transfiguration – an epiphany or manifestation – of God's presence and incarnation among us. Color for the day is white.

Lent

Lent prepares us for Jesus' death on the cross. It begins on Ash Wednesday, 40 days before Easter (not including Sundays), first designated in AD 325 at the Council of Nicea. The forty days of Lent matches the time period Jesus spent facing temptation in the wilderness after his baptism.

Lent has traditionally been a time for fasting, prayer and penance. Christians are asked to re-examine their lives and faith and challenged to deepen their relationship with God.

Since Lent is a somber season, flowers are removed from the sanctuary, and songs of praise are limited. Each Sunday in Lent at Sardis, we extinguish one of seven lenten candles. The ritual of extinguishing candles and reading passages from scripture regarding Jesus' death and God's

forgiveness and salvation are taken from a service called “Tenebrae” – meaning darkness. The service was instituted in the Middle Ages during Holy Week and alternated scripture readings, hymns or chants with the extinguishing of candles until the room was dark. We have divided up the service into the six Sundays of Lent, then extinguish the last candle at the end of the Maundy Thursday service.

Palm Sunday is the last Sunday of Lent and the beginning of Holy Week. It signifies the day of Jesus’ triumphant entrance into Jerusalem to palm waving crowds, in contrast to Good Friday’s crowds that yelled, “Crucify him!” The season of Lent ends with two services. On Maundy Thursday, we remember the Last Supper. Good Friday, which we celebrate with Sardis Presbyterian Church and St. Stephen United Methodist Church, commemorates Jesus’ death on the cross.

The color is purple, which denotes royalty. Jesus was crucified as the “King of the Jews.” Purple is also the color symbolizing repentance. Black, or no colors, is used on Good Friday.

Easter

In one sense Easter has been celebrated by Christians since the days of Paul’s ministry. He called the Church to gather for worship on Sunday – the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Every Sunday was to be an Easter celebration. One person has quipped, “Sundays are little Easters and Easter is a big Sunday.”

Jewish Christians continued to observe Passover, although with new meaning because of Jesus’ death. After Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, Jewish Christians were dispersed across the empire. Their Passover observance may have influenced Christian churches to begin

celebrating Easter as a special Sunday once a year. This became a common practice by turn of the 2nd century. Easter was the first holy day to be celebrated by the Christian Church.

The season of Easter lasts 50 days (seven weeks plus one Sunday) and was set in some areas during the 2nd century. The season followed the Jewish practice following up Passover with Pentecost, fifty days later. During the season of Easter an emphasis is placed on Jesus' resurrection, praise and adoration of God, and God's unconditional love.

The last Sunday of Easter is known as Ascension Sunday. It observes Jesus' ascension into heaven forty days after his resurrection.

The season is white, symbolizing victory and purity.

Pentecost

Fifty days after Easter, Pentecost is the observance of the gift of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. The word Pentecost literally means "fifty." It is celebrated fifty days after Easter.

Pentecost is also a Jewish holiday. The reason the miracle of Pentecost happened is because Jews from around the Roman Empire were in Jerusalem for the holiday. When the Holy Spirit fell upon the Christian believers they began preaching the gospel in the languages of all the people in Jerusalem that day.

Pentecost may be called the birthday of the Church, for it was really on that day the disciples took up the leadership of Christ's ministry under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The color is red for Pentecost Sunday. Red symbolizes the Spirit which fell on the disciples' tongues like flames of fire. Some older Christian traditions used red for part of

the season. Most today use green, emphasizing the growth of the church and the maturity of believers' faith. At Sardis we use both colors. Red from Pentecost Sunday through Labor Day Weekend, then green until Advent.

The weeks following Pentecost may be referred to as "Ordinary Time." We use the more traditional, "Sundays after Pentecost." This Season following Pentecost is nearly half the calendar year, depending on Easter's date. Its emphasis should be on the ministry of the Church and living the Christian life.

Trinity Sunday is the first Sunday after Pentecost and emphasizes our Christian belief in the Trinity – God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

All Saints' Day is observed on November 1st, or the Sunday following it. At Sardis, we reserve a portion of the service that day to remember church members and loved ones of church members who died the previous twelve months. All Saints' Sunday is a reaffirmation of the resurrection and a recognition that we have received our faith from those who have passed on before us.

Christ the King Sunday is the Sunday before Advent and the last in the Christian Year. This day emphasizes the guarantee of God's ultimate and final victory over sin, death and evil, which was foreshadowed in Jesus' death and resurrection. It is a celebration of the vision from Revelation – a new heaven and a new earth. The color is white for Trinity, All Saints' and Christ the King Sunday.

ACOLYTE

The word 'acolyte' means helper. An acolyte 'helps' us begin our worship. At Sardis we use three acolytes; a crucifer (cross-bearer), a light-bearer and a bible-bearer. The three process in that order.

The carrying of the cross symbolizing the call for Christian worshipers to follow the cross of Jesus Christ. We are to be witnesses of God's peace and justice in the world as we daily carry our crosses.

The candles on the communion table are lit at the beginning of the service and extinguished at the end of the service. Fire is one symbol for the Holy Spirit. The acolyte brings in a flame of fire reminding us that we gather for worship in community with God. Jesus said, "Whenever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am, also." The lit candles on the communion table are a continuing reminder of God's presence throughout worship.

The Bible is brought into the service as a reminder that God's revelation has been given to us. We do not own it. It has been revealed to us. We are to be people of *the book*.

At the end of the service, the light-bearer transfers the flame back to the torch and then extinguishes the candles. Then, as the benediction is being said the three acolytes carry out the cross, the flame and the Bible. This symbolizes several realities. As we leave, we are to follow the cross. But we do not have to carry the cross, alone. God goes out into the world before us. God blazes the trail for us. God is with us out in the world, too – that's what the flame symbolizes. God doesn't stay behind in the sanctuary when we leave. God is "out there" for us as well. Finally, we are people who should search for God's revelation in the scriptures. As you go about living this week, be people of the book.

BANNERS

Banners depicting Christian symbols adorn the sanctuary. They are rotated through the Christian year.

Currently, we have 11 banners – Advent, Lent, Easter, Communion, Trumpets, Sunrise, Cross & Crown, Wheat, Purple/Red, Transfiguration, and the Celtic Cross.

Symbols have been used in the Christian Church from its beginning. Remains of the oldest house churches in the Roman Empire reveal religious artwork painted on the walls, or as frescos, or on the floor as a mosaic tile. By the late first millennium icons were popular in corporate worship and private prayer. Icons are religious pictures used as a tool to personally relate to Jesus Christ. A believer would not pray *to* the icon, but *through* the icon. Some Christians felt the use of icons was a form of idolatry – of creating an image of God. A great controversy developed between Eastern (Greek) Christianity and Western (Latin) Christianity around the turn of the millennium. Western Christian rejected the use of icons, while Eastern Orthodox Christians embraced them.

The Protestant Reformation enforced an even stricter use of symbols and art. Many Catholic churches were stripped of their statues, artwork plastered over and stained glass windows smashed. Most Protestants have come to the conclusion we may have gone a bit overboard nearly 500 years ago and artwork has made a limited return into Protestant churches.

Our banners serve as a simple and visual way to communicate the Christian message in an indirect way.

MUSIC IN WORSHIP

A volunteer choir under the direction of Pam Greenwood, our minister of music, provides music each Sunday, along with an occasional solo or duet. The use of laity choirs in American churches came out of the Camp Meeting Revivals of the early 19th century, and initially

made inroads in Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. These camp meetings placed a high emphasis on priesthood of the believers and on active worship participation.

The use of a volunteer choir composed of lay members succeeded the older tradition of using clergy, or altar boys, for choral presentation. Cathedrals and monasteries had enough monks and priests to form choirs. Smaller parishes would rely on an order of pre-adolescent boys to form boys choirs and to assist the priest with worship. In all services the priest would chant or sing part of the liturgy. So, music was a part of Christian worship long before volunteer choirs came along.

At Sardis our choir will usually sing one longer piece of music, an anthem, and occasionally offer shorter pieces as a Call to Worship (an invitation to worship at the beginning of the service), communion hymns (while the elements are distributed), a Kyrie (a call for mercy and forgiveness sung during Lent), or a choral benediction.

Hymnody has a longer history in Protestant churches than choirs. Martin Luther, the first Protestant reformer, wrote hymns to then familiar tunes. *A Mighty Fortress* is his most famous hymn and is in our hymnal. Charles Wesley, brother to John Wesley the founder of the Methodist Church, was a prolific hymn writer and composer. Hymn signing is one way that the congregation actively participates in the worship service. Singing hymns recovers one aspect of biblical worship. Many of the psalms were written as congregational songs. Paul quoted at least one Christian hymn in his writings – Philippians 2.

Music has a way to connecting with our emotions, our spirit. Singing is a natural way to connect the whole congregation with God in praise and prayer. Whether you

could sing with the opera, or can't carry a tune, our voices blended together offer our worship to God.

We use the Baptist Hymnal for congregational singing. We also conclude the Lord's Prayer by singing a response. Most often that is one of two choruses; the Doxology or the Gloria Patri. The Doxology was written in the early days of the Reformation and its tune was one of first common hymn tunes. The Gloria Patri (Glory Father) is much older. Christians have been singing it in worship for over 1700 years. Sometimes we will sing a contemporary chorus as a response to the Invocation and Lord's Prayer. We also are beginning to use Taize music, a form of congregational singing from an ecumenical monastic order in France.

A HOUSE OF PRAYER

Several prayers are offered to God during worship at Sardis and each has a specific purpose. The *invocation* is the first prayer of the service. In it, we invoke, or invite and seek, God's blessing and presence as we worship. We ask God to open us to the Holy Spirit. One of the church's deacons prays the invocation and concludes it by leading the congregation in the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is the only one the gospels record Jesus teaching his disciples. This simple prayer covers the five great aspects of any prayer – praise, seeking God's will, petition, confession and protection or guidance.

Some Sundays (and every Sunday in Lent) we may offer a *Confessional Prayer*. Protestants do not go to confessional booths to repent of their sins to a priest as Catholics do. However, we do believe the Bible calls for us to confess and repent from our sins. As priests to one another, we make our confessions public and as a part of the community of faith offer them to God. The spoken

confessional prayer is usually followed by silence and worshipers are encouraged to privately make the general spoken prayer a more specific confession to God. A confessional prayer, spoken and silent, is always followed by an Assurance of Pardon, or Forgiveness. The minister or worship leader will read a verse of scripture that proclaims God's forgiveness. He or she does not use his or her own words, because it is God who forgives, not the minister or worship leader.

In our *Morning Prayer* we lift up prayer concerns of the congregation. Worshipers are invited to name requests before the prayer. Some churches call this the pastoral prayer or the congregational prayer. It is both of those. It is a pastoral or shepherding prayer offered by a church leader for the people, or congregation. The Morning Prayer encompasses the requests of members, community and world situations, confession of sin and request for guidance in the living of our faith.

The *Benediction* concludes the service. The benediction offers God's blessing upon God's people as they depart. Usually some form of the word "go" will be included, "As you go..." In a way, the benediction is a reserve prayer – a blessing from God to us, rather than a prayer from us to God. The minister will raise one or both hands as a sign of God's blessing – a symbol that goes back to the Old Testament. Since the benediction is a prayer that worshipers receive, rather than give, they are encouraged to look at the minister as she or he speaks.

Most benedictions are verses of scripture. The most popular benediction is found in Numbers 6. There are many benedictions in the Bible. Paul concludes most of his letters with a benediction. Benedictions that do not directly quote scripture will combine Biblical images or themes.

Dr. Moore always ends the benediction by quoting from Philippians 4 -- “And may the peace of God, the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

PRELUDE AND POSTLUDE

The beginning and ending of every worship service at Sardis is music. A piano prelude and postlude commences and concludes our worship of God. The worship service begins when Irene Hramenkova, church pianist, begins playing. The prelude gives us a chance to settle ourselves, prepare ourselves for active worship participation. Irene’s selections tend to be a mix of familiar hymn tunes and classical sacred music. The postlude sends us back into the world with the sound of celebration and faith.

OFFERING

An offering is taken during Sunday morning worship. The act of giving to God through the church’s ministries is an act of worship. Every time we contribute a tithe or offering we are in one sense recommitting ourselves to Christ’s church and ministry. Jesus commended a widow who gave her last coins as an act of worship in the Jerusalem Temple.

Ushers collect the offering and present it to God when placing it on the communion table. Most of the time we collect the offering near the middle of the service. Occasionally, we collect the offering at the end of the service, just after the hymn of invitation. Taken up at this point of the service, it is easy to connect contributing an offering with the decision to accept Jesus Christ and to be baptized. Both are commitments to God; one is for life, the other is an ongoing practice of the first.

Congregational

BIBLE READING

Baptists place a high emphasis on the scriptures. Like other Protestants, we hold the Bible as our sole authority on matters of faith and practice. Therefore, Bible reading is a vital part of our worship services.

The sermon is based on the Bible. It should be a commentary on a biblical text, or passage. At least one passage will be read and be expounded (explained) upon in the sermon. Often times a second passage will be read and complement the primary passage. If the sermon follows the lectionary, as many as four passages may be used.

A spoken Call to Worship acts as an invitation to worship and usually comes from the book of Psalms. The benediction normally includes the quotation of scripture. The Lord's Prayer is taken from Matthew's gospel. When serving communion scripture is usually quoted. A spoken Assurance of Forgiveness, following a confessional prayer, is always a biblical passage.

Baptisms, child dedications, ordinations are all enacted under the guidance and reading of scripture.

SERMON

Baptists place a high priority on studying the Bible. That's why a sermon, based on the Bible, has such a prominent place in the worship service. When Huldreich Zwingli, a forerunner to Baptists, reformed the Christian Church in Zurich, he threw out the artwork, the music and had two-hour long sermons explaining the Bible verse by verse. Don't worry, at Sardis we feel Zwingli may have gone a little overboard.

This emphasis on the Bible is also why our pulpit is a visual focal point in the sanctuary. A sermon should be a

contemporary commentary of God's word for the people of God. It may be said that a good sermon comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

Sermons have been a vital part of Christian worship from the beginning of the Church. Soon after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples in Jerusalem on Pentecost, Peter preached to the crowd. Most of the Pentecost account in Acts 2 is the text of Peter's sermon. Jesus on the Sabbath he returned to his synagogue in Nazareth read the Bible reading of the day and then gave his commentary on the passage. Reading from and preaching on the Bible is an act of worship that Christians took from the Jewish worship tradition.

DRAMA

Occasionally, a brief drama will be performed in worship for the purpose of raising an issue that will be addressed during the sermon. Drama is an ideal way to connect us to a particular subject because we observe drama indirectly, like outsiders peering through an invisible, imaginary wall. This allows us to become personally engaged without feeling directly confronted.

Dramas at Sardis will usually have an open-ending. This allows worshippers to create their own ending as they hear and interpret the sermon.

Drama was once a vibrant part of worship. The first record of a drama in worship was "Whom do you seek?" written around AD 900, in which the discovery of Jesus' resurrection was acted out. Within a couple hundred years, drama was utilized in churches across Europe. Plays that took the whole length of the service were written. Musical dramas were composed. Drama was originally used to act out stories in scripture. Later, as scripts were loosened

from the exact words of scripture in order to apply biblical insights – what became known as “Morality Plays” – criticism of drama increased. In 1207 Pope Innocent III banished drama from worship, and the popular dramas moved to the village courtyard square.

It was not until the 20th century that drama returned to worship services.

BLACK ROBES

During the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter, our pastors will usually wear black academic robes. This follows a Reformation tradition indicating that the preacher speaks from the pulpit as one who has studied the Bible, theology, and humanities. The vestments (clothing) of Catholic priests had become quite elaborate by the end of the Middle Ages and represented many different aspects of Church tradition. The Reformers, who championed the Bible as the sole authority for faith matters instead of Church tradition, had their ministers wear black academic robes. The robes were granted upon graduation from studying religion, scripture and theology at a university, using them in worship further accentuated the centrality of scripture in worship.

Baptists for the most part had lost this tradition by the turn of the 20th century. Some Baptists, based on the priesthood of the believers, would say that the preacher should dress and look like the congregation. So at Sardis we split the symbols. During the services around Christmas and Easter and other special occasions, our pastors wear robes. The rest of the year they preach and lead worship in the clothes they wear to the meetinghouse.

Black robes were given to graduates as the first universities were springing up in Europe during the 12th

century. Almost all the students were members of the clergy who studied religion and humanities. A master's robe and hood (the multi-colored piece that wraps over the shoulders and hangs in back) have large pockets in the sleeves and hood because this is a person of many books and needs room to store them. A doctor's robe and hood has no "pockets" because it's all supposed to be in his or her head. On special occasions the pastors may wear the academic hoods.

Stoles worn around the neck and down the front of the robe signify the color of the Christian season and match the paraments on the communion table and pulpit. (See "Christian Year" for explanation of the colors.)

Baptist

BAPTIST HERITAGE

Worship at our church is celebrated in the Baptist tradition. Baptist worship revolves around three ideals: the centrality of scripture, the priesthood of the believers and the eschewing of sacraments. The Protestant Reformation (early 1500's) birthed each of these ideals and Baptists have emphasized them in their own way.

1) The centrality of scripture comes from Martin Luther's "scripture alone" doctrine, stating that in matters of faith and practice the Bible is the sole authority for the church. Baptists emphasize this ideal in two ways. First, the pulpit – the place where scripture is read and commentary about scripture is preached – at Sardis it is the central focal point in the sanctuary. Second, the sermon – the preached commentary on scripture – covers a substantial portion of the worship service. Baptists believe that hearing God's word preached and leaving to act upon God's word is one of the most important aspects of worship.

2) The priesthood of believers, which was a doctrine of both the Lutheran and the Reformed branches of the Protestant Reformation, was heightened by the second wave of the movement, sometimes called the Radical Reformation (late 1500's & early 1600's). Baptists were born in this period and steadfastly held the point that baptism should be reserved for believers – in other words, no infant baptisms. Each person must respond to God's grace, repent, and seek Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Then, and only then, should a person be baptized. This egalitarian approach to baptism had several implications, namely that if a person is competent to respond to God's saving grace, she or he is competent to interpret other

directions of God's word and/or God's Spirit. All baptized believers, not just the clergy, have a right and responsibility to interpret scripture and Spirit as well as serve the church in their area of giftedness.

At Sardis we involve church members in the leadership of worship, and encourage congregational participation.

3) Baptists reject the notion of sacraments. A sacrament is an instrument conferring God's saving grace. Baptists believe nothing does that except faith alone. The Roman Catholic Church pronounced in 1215 that there are seven sacraments – baptism, confirmation, Eucharist (communion), penance (reconciliation), extreme unction (anointing of the sick), ordination and matrimony. In Catholic theology partaking of the sacraments is necessary for salvation. They are instruments that physically/spiritually bestow God's grace. In particular, transubstantiation was also adopted in 1215 as the proper understanding of the Eucharist. This doctrine stated that bread and wine's reality is changed at their consecration in the Mass into Christ's body and blood.

The Protestant Reformation narrowed the list of sacraments down to two – baptism and communion. Luther spoke of the "real presence" of Christ in the bread and wine of communion, but fell short of keeping the doctrine of transubstantiation. Calvin, however, explained that Christ was in heaven and that only his "spiritual presence" was in the elements of communion. Baptists went even further. Following the Zurich reformer, Huldreich Zwingli, they stated that communion is simply a symbolic memory of Jesus' sacrifice. They also refused to call communion and baptism sacraments – something that confers God's grace. They are ordinances – something that has been mandated by Christ for us to do.

This idea that nothing can transmit grace except faith means that no particular ritual of worship *has* to be done in a Baptist church. Many Baptist churches keep a very simple service because of that. This also means that all acts of worship, including baptism and communion, are symbols for the deeper, inner faith relationship we have with Jesus Christ. At Sardis we use this Baptist freedom as permission to utilize many different rituals to make worship more creative and to visually and verbally symbolize aspects of the Christian faith. If we think it will help our members worship, we will “borrow things” from our sister Christian denominations. We always reserve the right to interpret and explain rituals and acts of worship as we feel led, so as to connect the outward act of worship to the inward experience of faith.

COMMUNION

One of two ordinances that Baptists observe, Communion, or the Lord’s Supper, is celebrated six Sundays a year at Sardis and additionally on Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve.

Baptists interpret the Lord’s Supper as a memorial. In eating bread and drinking from the cup together, we remember Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave. Baptists believe this is a symbolic event. The bread is bread; the liquid in the cup, grape juice. The meaning of the service comes from our faith, not through the physical nature of the communion elements.

Baptists borrowed this theological concept from Huldreich Zwingli, the Protestant Reformer in Zurich. Zwingli radically opposed the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation – belief that the communion elements become Christ’s body when they are consecrated on the

altar – and confronted Luther for not completely departing from the Catholic view. In fact Luther and Zwingli's disagreement regarding Communion kept the first two Protestant movements from joining as one in 1529, roughly seven to ten years before John Calvin began to be noticed for his Protestant views.

BAPTISM

Baptists practice believer's baptism by immersion. Meaning, first, that we only baptize persons who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and second, that our form of baptism is to immerse persons under water.

Baptists borrowed the idea of believer's baptism from a group called the Anabaptists. (Moravians, Mennonites, Amish are the direct descendants of Anabaptists.) They had split off from Zwingli's reformed church in Zurich over the issue of baptism. Encouraged by Zwingli to live life as close to the Bible as possible, the Anabaptists came to the conclusion that there was no evidence of infant baptism in the New Testament. As they saw it, the only people baptized in the Bible were adults who first confessed their faith. Zwingli, who didn't want them to live *that* close to the Bible, denounced them. Around 1607 an Anabaptist group living in Amsterdam, Holland influenced an exiled English congregation. Several decided to be baptized as adults and to withhold baptism from their babies (before 1600 nearly every baby in Europe was baptized as soon as possible). When the English returned to England they formed the first Baptist church.

The New Testament mandate from Acts 2:38, "Repent, believe and be baptized," seems to clearly state that repentance and belief should precede baptism. Baptists follow the thinking that each person must enter into a

relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and not until a person confesses Christ as Lord should he or she be baptized.

Baptism is a symbol. It does not confer salvation upon a person. Our faith in Jesus Christ is what brings salvation to us. Our faith in Jesus saves us from sin, from death and ultimately from evil. Baptism symbolizes the faith that has already taken place in the heart and soul. Immersion symbolizes a person's death to an old way of life and a resurrection to a new life in Christ. This symbol fits the change of perspective embodied when a person becomes Christian. It also illustrates what we believe God will do with us at the end of our earthly life.

When the minister immerses a person, she is "buried" in a watery grave. When the minister raises that person out of the water, she is "raised" to new life.

Some would also say that baptism by immersion symbolizes that God has cleansed this person from sin.

At Sardis we baptize all persons professing their faith in Jesus Christ. Persons who have already been baptized and confirmed in another Christian faith tradition may be baptized, but it is not required.

Baptism will usually be preceded by scripture readings pertaining to baptism and salvation, a baptism prayer written for the candidate and music. "Wade in the Water" is often sung as the candidate enters the baptistry. Anita Robinson, a former choir member, taught this Negro spiritual to the congregation.

BABY DEDICATION

While Baptists do not baptize infants, we do celebrate the joy of new life and emphasize the importance of raising children in the Christian faith. A baby dedication is an

opportunity for family and church to offer thanksgiving to God for the gift of a child. It is a ritual whereby parents, siblings, extended family and the whole congregation take the first steps of raising a child in the Christian faith.

Parents reaffirm their faith in Jesus Christ and promise to dedicate themselves to nurture their child in the faith. The congregation, likewise, promises to support the parents and family and to do their part in nurturing faith into this young life. A prayer of dedication is responsively read by all.

Then, the pastor blesses the child with a benediction from the Bible. A drop of oil may be anointed on the head of the child and the sign of the cross made over the child. Anointing the head with oil is a biblical practice signifying blessing and healing. Psalm 23 mentions it as a sign of blessing from God.

A baby dedication reminds us that each baby is a child of God, made in God's image and that God's grace will be near each child. It also reminds us that parents and congregation have a job to do – to share our faith with each child so that one day she will claim Christ as her Lord and Savior.

MEETINGHOUSE, SANCTUARY & FURNITURE

Borrowing from an old Baptist tradition, our building is called the Meetinghouse. The first Baptists along with Friends (Quakers) and some Reformed Churches (Presbyterian) wanted to emphasize that the *church* was the congregation of people, not the building. The use of meetinghouse distinguishes the building from the church, which is the congregation of believers. Sardis Baptist Meetinghouse is the place where Sardis Baptist Church (the people) meet.

Meetinghouses tended to be rather simple in their design and their sanctuaries minimally decorated. The theology behind the design and architecture of meetinghouses and their sanctuaries was a focus on the direct relationship believers have with God. Artwork, icons, elaborate rituals, even priests and ministers were thought to obstruct a direct link with God. Where they could be helpful, they were tolerated, but it was thought best to keep them to a minimum. Our sanctuary has retained much of that simple meetinghouse style.

However, we are not Quakers. We do have some symbols. The most prominent are the crosses. A brass cross is located on the communion table, a second wooden cross hangs on the wall to the right of the chancel. These Protestant crosses, or empty crosses, note that Jesus is no longer on the cross; he has been resurrected.

There are two candles on the communion table. The lighting of candles is a symbol of God's Holy Spirit and they remind us that we worship in God's presence.

Paraments (colored cloths) hang from the pulpit and cover the communion table. The colors mark the Christian season and are changed accordingly – purple for advent and lent, white for Christmas and Easter and a few other special days, red for Pentecost and the Sundays following, green for Sundays following Epiphany and Pentecost.

The main floor of the sanctuary is called the nave. The risers which hold our pulpit and choir pews cover an area called the chancel. In churches that emphasize the importance of the clergy, the chancel will be more removed from the people sitting in the nave. Sometimes a partial wall or railing will separate the chancel from the nave. In churches that emphasize the importance of the laity, the

distinction of the chancel from the nave will be negligible, even not existent.

The focal point of our sanctuary is the pulpit and communion table. The pulpit is centrally located on the chancel to note the central importance of the preached word of God. Baptists believe reading the scripture and hearing a commentary on that scripture is a primary purpose of worship.

The communion table is not an altar. An altar is an object on which sacrifices are made and/or holy relics are honored. Baptists believe that Christ gave his life as the final sacrifice to God. No other sacrifices are necessary. The Catholic Church (Lutheran and Episcopalian, too) has an altar. Each week in the Mass at the time of the Eucharist, the body of Christ is broken, sacrificed again in the form of the sanctified bread.

The communion table illustrates the Baptist belief that communion is an act of remembrance. We remember the day Jesus and his disciples gathered around a table for what is now called the Last Supper. We remember the words Jesus said that night and the death he died the next day as well as the resurrection he experienced on Easter Sunday.

A communion table is placed between the people sitting in the nave and the worship leaders on the chancel, so that as a congregation we are always around the table. A communion table is normally placed on the nave level.

Churches that place primary importance on taking the Lord's Supper in worship, normally have an altar and make the altar the focal point of the sanctuary. The altar is usually placed at the back of the chancel, far from the people.

PASTORS' SEATING

In Baptist churches the pastor is a member, who joins the church just like everyone else. Our pastors sit in the same chairs that all worshipers do to symbolize this theological belief that the pastor speaks from and with the congregation, not to the congregation. Unlike the Catholic Church where priests take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience when they are ordained – literally meaning “set apart” – Baptist pastors are expected to live in the world along with everyone else in the congregation (with family, mortgage, etc.). From this perspective, from these “seats,” our pastors preach from the Bible.

INVITATION

Baptist churches usually offer an invitation at the end of the service, just prior to the last hymn. The last hymn is often called the invitational hymn. This tradition was not an original part of Baptist worship, but grew out of the Camp Meetings and revival period of the 18th and 19th centuries.

At the invitation, the minister invites persons to join the church. Persons who have not been baptized are encouraged to profess their love of God and faith in Jesus Christ and desire to be baptized. Christians who are not members are invited to transfer their membership by a statement of their faith in Jesus Christ. During the invitational hymn, persons desiring to join the church walk forward to greet the pastor. After the hymn, they are received, introduced to the congregation and voted into the membership by the congregation. Persons may also make a recommitment of their faith during the invitation hymn, or make a public profession of their call to vocational Christian ministry.

This act of walking forward to join the church follows the tradition birthed in Camp Meetings held across frontier America early in the 19th century. Frontier folks would travel for hours and days to a Camp Meeting that may last for weeks. Families would stay for as many days as they could be away from the farm. It was part religious renewal, part socializing (frontier life could be isolating). Bible studies, preaching services and baptisms were held during the day with nightly worship services. Those evangelistic (often hell-fire and damnation) services ended with a time for sinners to repent, and to ask for God's salvation through faith in Jesus. The preacher would call for the repentant sinners to come forward as an act of faith and commitment. Repentant sinners would be prayed for and usually the next day they would be baptized.

By coming forward at the time of invitation, a candidate for membership is acknowledging God's free gift of salvation while acting out of human freewill to respond to God's grace.

ORDINATION

Ordination is an act of setting apart. It has been practiced in the Christian Church since hands were laid on the first deacons, months after Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Catholic Church through the centuries held to the doctrine of apostolic succession – which meant that is an unbroken line of ordination from contemporary priests back to Jesus' disciples. Jesus chose his disciples, who laid their hands on the first leaders in the church, who ordained the next generation of priests and deacons, and so on and so forth until this day. The belief is that some intangible

spiritual power passes from the ordained person through his hands to the candidate for ordination.

Baptists, who along with most Protestants, disregarded many of the rituals and acts of the Catholic Church during the Reformation period of the 16th and 17th centuries. Baptist practice ordination by laying on of hands just as the Church has for 2,000 years. However, who lays on hands is entirely different.

Baptist do not believe the power of ordination lies in the unbroken link of generations of ordained priests. It lies in the faith of the community.

So, first the community (the congregation) selects whom it will ordain. It selects its leaders, whether deacons or clergy. Then, it decides who best symbolizes the faith of the community to represent the confidence in the ordination candidate and to train the new leader.

In many Baptist churches persons laying hands on an ordination candidate are persons who have been ordained by that particular church. In others, all ordained persons in the Baptist tradition of faith may lay hands on the candidate.

At Sardis we join Baptist churches who invite all members of the congregation to come forward and lay hands on the candidate. The purpose of this symbol is to acknowledge that leaders are lifted up and trained by the whole congregation, not just a segment of the membership.

The act of laying on of hands was practiced in biblical times and recorded in both testaments. It is symbolic of one generation of leadership passing on the mantle of leadership to a new generation and of the new generation submitting to the tradition and heritage of the previous generation.

During an ordination the candidate is always in a kneeling or sitting position, a position of humility. The persons laying on their hands and praying for the candidate are always standing, a position of strength. The candidate is receiving the approval, the support, the spiritual power of the congregation through this act of worship. The spiritual power of the congregation is simply their collective faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

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