

Stories from the four churches

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While the large and lively mixed-age congregation arrive for worship, the **St Ann's** music group plays a selection of thematic hymns and choruses in order to focus people's attention on worship and set the initial mood of the service.

The congregation join in the singing; the song numbers have been printed on the service sheet. The music stops three or four minutes before the ministers enter and take their places. The congregation become quiet, attentive and prayerful – a sense of expectancy is in the air. The minister rises to call the people to worship with the greeting:

God is spirit.

Let us worship him in spirit and truth.

Then, after the opening hymn of praise, the congregation sit for an imaginative presentation of the notices, done by two people in a 'sharing the news' style. This is regarded as part of the worship, both giving a sense of belonging and bringing all the church's activities into the presence of God. The notices end with a reminder of today's learning themes (for adults, children and young people), some silence and the opening collect.

Other options which **St Ann's** has used for Gathering and Greeting include:

- * the giving of the Peace;
- * a solo song or hymn;
- * some verses from a psalm, sung as an introit by the choir at the back of the church;
- * a spoken verse of a song or hymn.

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At **St Bartholomew's** the organist quietly plays a simple voluntary based on a seasonal hymn melody on the small village organ while the congregation arrive for worship. The minister has hurried from another village and makes his way to the vestry in order to robe and have a few moments of prayer before the service begins. The churchwarden has taken care to ensure that everything is prepared for worship before the minister arrives and she announces the opening hymn. As the congregation sing, the minister makes his way to his place from the back of the church. At the end of the hymn, he greets the congregation with a seasonal greeting and invites them to join with him in some moments of

silence before saying a prayer of preparation for worship.

□

At **St Christopher's** good quality taped music is relayed gently through the amplification system as the multi-cultural, mixed-age congregation take their seats. The choir is already seated five minutes before the service is advertised to begin. When the taped music ceases, the churchwarden gives out some notices, announces the opening song of praise and invites people to keep a time of silence before the organ plays the first line. As the lights are turned full on, a well-ordered procession of crucifer, acolytes and two ministers enters the church, the deacon holding aloft the Book of the Gospels. As soon as the song is finished, the president welcomes the people with a responsive greeting, announces the theme of the service and invites the people to make their confession.

□

It is Pentecost at **St Dodo's** and the clergy and choir are hurrying to prepare for worship as the congregation arrive. The organist starts to play a difficult voluntary with some unexpected stops and starts five minutes before the service is advertised to begin. Four minutes after the service should have begun the minister appears at the front of the church, nods at the organist to stop playing, welcomes everyone and realizes that the amplification system is not working. High-pitched feedback jolts everyone awake as the amplification comes to life. No one can hear the announcement of the number of the opening processional hymn. Choir and clergy process slowly in a ragged crocodile to their seats. The minister turns and greets the people again – this time with a liturgical greeting. He then tells everyone to be seated and announces the notices for the week at some length, before inviting the congregation to join him in a prayer of preparation for worship.



Greetings and their meanings

The opening greeting establishes a relationship between the minister and the rest of the congregation. In choosing what to include, the minister will consider the options (including a formal welcome, perhaps followed by more informal comments, a prayer, an acclamation of praise, or a call to worship) and try to use a greeting that is right for the context, and to remember that greetings convey unspoken messages:

- * 'Hello!' ('Good morning', 'Welcome, everyone', etc.) is a reflection of shared human ordinariness that links worship with the rest of life.
- * 'The Lord be with you – and also with you' speaks of mutual prayer for one another and an expectation of God's presence.
- * A sentence of Scripture as the first utterance puts the emphasis firmly on God, but doesn't establish a relationship between worshippers.

* 'I couldn't hear you singing' establishes a (probably unhealthy) relationship of power.

Commentary

The service should have a clear beginning. The liturgical greeting may follow some introductory singing, or a hymn or a sentence of Scripture, and may be followed by a brief introduction or an opening prayer.

Note 1, A Service of the Word

Each church has its own way of making clear that the service is about to start, whether by the entrance of a procession, the start of the first hymn, or the turning on of the overhead projector. Whatever you do, make it clear. There is nothing wrong with some silence before a service, or some music or worship songs to help people prepare themselves, but everyone needs to know when we have stopped being a collection of individuals and are being summoned as a *body* of people to worship God together.

One of the functions of the opening stages of the service is to allow people consciously to bring to God all that is going on in the rest of their lives as they come to worship. The spoken texts can help that; so can silence. The sharing of the Peace might also be an appropriate part of the Gathering and Greeting. Care should also be taken to ensure that the form of greeting or opening prayer flows naturally into what is to follow. A greeting that works well if followed by a hymn of praise might not fit if penitence is to follow.

Notes to the resources

- 1 More examples of responses that may be suitable for use at the beginning of the service can be found in Resource Section G, 'Praise' ([here](#)).
- 2 The resources provided below should be adapted as necessary if the Peace is to be included.
- 3 'Alleluia' may be added to many of the greetings, for example at Easter and Pentecost.

Greetings, calls to worship and other introductions

General

A1

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the love of God,

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

be with you

and also with you.

General

A2

Welcome in the name of Christ.

God’s grace, mercy and peace be with you

and also with you.

General

A3

The grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you

and also with you.

General

A4

Grace, mercy and peace

from God our Father

and the Lord Jesus Christ

be with you

and also with you.

cf 1 Timothy 1.2

General

A5

The Lord of glory be with you.

The Lord bless you.

(This greeting may be used before or after other introductions. 'The Lord of glory' may be replaced by other similar phrases, for example 'The risen Lord', 'The Lord of mercy', 'The Lord of all creation'.)

General

A6

Through Christ let us offer our sacrifice of praise to God.

Let our lips proclaim his praise.

cf Hebrews 13.15

General

A7

O Lord, open our lips

and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

O God, make speed to save us.

O Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning is now

and shall be for ever. Amen.

Praise the Lord.

The Lord's name be praised.

cf Psalm 51.15; 70.1

General

A8

Praise our God, all you his servants:

those who fear him, both small and great.

cf Revelation 19.5

General

A9

Praise the name of the Lord;

ascribe greatness to our God.

Lord, open our lips

and we shall praise your name.

cf Deuteronomy 32.3; Psalm 51.15

General

A10

The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

Let us rejoice and shout for joy,

giving God the glory.

Glory to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning is now

and shall be for ever. Amen.

cf Revelation 19.6,7

General

A11

The Lord be with you

and also with you.

Let us worship God.

General

A12

We come from scattered lives to meet with God.

Let us recognize his presence with us.

Silence is kept.

As God’s people we have gathered:

let us worship him together.

General (morning)

Incarnation

A13

God in Christ has revealed his glory.

Come let us worship.

From the rising of the sun to its setting

the Lord’s name is greatly to be praised.

Give him praise, you servants of the Lord.

O praise the name of the Lord!

General (morning)

Resurrection

A14

The light and peace of Jesus Christ be with you

and also with you.

The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

Let us rejoice and sing God’s praise for ever.

General (morning)

Resurrection

A15

This is the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalms 118.24

General (evening)

A16

O Lord, we call to you: come to us quickly.

Hear us when we cry to you.

Let our prayers rise up before you like incense.

Let our lifted hands be like an evening sacrifice.

Glory to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning is now

and shall be for ever. Amen.

cf Psalms 141.1,2

General (evening)

A17

May the light and peace of Jesus Christ our Lord

be with you.

The Lord bless you.

General (evening)

Resurrection

A18

Jesus Christ is the light of the world:

a light no darkness can quench.

Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening:

and the day is almost over.

Even the darkness is not dark for you:

and the night shines like the day.

Let your light scatter the darkness:

and fill your church with your glory.

cf John 1.5; 8.12; Psalm 139.12; Luke 24.29

General

Father, Son and Spirit

A19

We meet in the name of God:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

General

Father, Son and Spirit

A20

We meet in the name of God:

God the Father,

God the Son,

God the Spirit:

God is one.

General

Resurrection

Holy Spirit

A21

O Lord, open our lips

and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Give us the joy of your saving help

and sustain us with your life-giving Spirit.

General

Holy Spirit

A22

God is spirit.

Let us worship him in spirit and truth.

The Lord is with us.

Let us praise his name together.

cf John 4.24

General

Father, Son and Spirit

A23

Let us worship God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

The Lord be with you

and also with you.

General

Heaven

A24

We stand before the throne of God

with countless crowds

from every nation and race, tribe and language.

Blessing and glory and wisdom,

thanksgiving and honour, power and might

be to our God for ever and ever.

Amen.

cf Revelation 7.9,12

General

Living in the world

A25

Let everything be said and done in the name of the

Lord Jesus,

giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ.

Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

let us sing to God with thankful hearts.

Open our lips, Lord:

and we shall praise your name.

cf Colossians 3.16,17

General

Time

A26

God is good

all the time.

All the time

God is good.

Christ's coming

Resurrection

A27

Praise God! For the Lord our God the almighty reigns!

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory.

Happy are those who have been invited

to the wedding-feast of the Lamb.

Amen. Praise the Lord!

cf Revelation 19.6,9

Incarnation

A28

Today we remember Jesus and the story of his birth;

Jesus is our King.

A candle may be lit.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world;

Jesus is our Way.

With Jesus even dark places are light;

Jesus is the Truth.

In Jesus we shall live for ever;

Jesus is our Life.

Incarnation

A29

We meet to celebrate the coming of Christ into the world.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us

and we beheld his glory.

Incarnation

A30

I bring you good news of great joy:

a Saviour has been born to you. Alleluia.

Unto us a child is born,

unto us a Son is given. Alleluia.

[Hear the words of St Luke:

When the angels had gone from them into heaven,

the shepherds said to one another,

‘Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened

which the Lord has made known to us.’

So they hastened, and found Mary and Joseph,

and the baby lying in a manger.]

He is Christ the Lord. Alleluia.

We worship and adore him. Alleluia.

Resurrection

A31

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ:

he has given us new life and hope

by raising Jesus from the dead.

[God has claimed us as his own:

He has made us light to the world.]

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Ascension

A32

Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Christ has ascended on high.

He reigns for ever. Alleluia.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord. Alleluia.

Heaven

A33

Jesus Christ has made us a kingdom of priests

to serve his God and Father.

To God be glory and kingship for ever and ever.

Grace, mercy and peace be with you

and also with you.

Lament

Relationships and healing

A34

We meet in the presence of God

who knows our needs,

hears our cries,

feels our pain,

and heals our wounds.

Opening prayers

General

A35

Lord, direct our thoughts, and teach us to pray.

Lift up our hearts to worship you in spirit and in truth,

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

General

A36

Faithful one, whose word is life:

come with saving power

to free our praise,

inspire our prayer

and shape our lives

for the kingdom of your Son,

Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

General

A37

Loving God, we have come to worship you.

Help us to pray to you in faith,

to sing your praise with gratitude,

and to listen to your word with eagerness;

through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

General

Resurrection

Ascension

A38

Almighty God,

your Son has opened for us

a new and living way into your presence.

Give us new hearts and constant wills

to worship you in spirit and in truth;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

General

Word

A39

Lord, speak to us

that we may hear your word.

Move among us

that we may behold your glory.

Receive our prayers

that we may learn to trust you.

Amen.

General

Living in the world

Time

A40

God of our days and years,

we set this time apart for you.

Form us in the likeness of Christ

so that our lives may glorify you.

Amen.

Father, Son and Spirit

A41

Holy God,

holy and strong,

holy and immortal:

have mercy on us.

Holy God,

holy and strong,

holy and immortal:

have mercy on us.

Silence

Eternal God, source of all blessing,

help us to worship you

with all our heart and mind and strength;

for you alone are God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

for ever and ever.

Amen.

Holy Spirit

A42

Let us pray.

Come, Holy Spirit,

fill the hearts of your faithful people,

and kindle in us the fire of your love;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Holy Spirit

Relationships and healing

A43

Be with us, Spirit of God;

nothing can separate us from your love.

Breathe on us, breath of God;

fill us with your saving power.

Speak in us, wisdom of God;

bring strength, healing and peace.

Silence is kept

The Lord is here.

His Spirit is with us.

Holy Spirit

A44

Faithful God,

who fulfilled the promises of Easter

by sending us your Holy Spirit,

and made known to every race and nation the way of

eternal life;

open our lips by your Spirit,

that every tongue may tell of your glory,

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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