



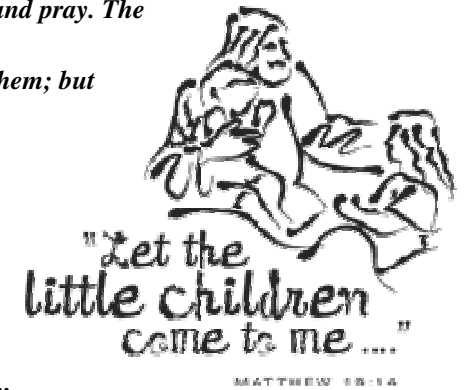
Worshiping With Your Child



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“Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs.’ And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.”
Matthew 19:13-15



Bethlehem Lutheran welcomes families to worship each week. We also realize that it is not always easy to worship with a child. We hope that this booklet will help deepen the worship experience for your child (and you as well) by giving you tools to teach your child to be an active participant in the worship service, rather than a bystander.



The most important tip is to RELAX! God put the wiggle in children. No one expects children (or adults) to be perfect. We do hope to mold children into full participants in the worship experience.

Let's start with some basic **“Worship Etiquette.”** The following *guidelines* will help instill behavior that will last a lifetime! Kids will be kids, but let's all *try* for the best (age appropriate) church behavior.

✚ **Worship together often.** The more often you practice, the better you get!

✚ **Visit the restroom before worship begins.** Only the smallest children are unable to wait until the service ends if business is taken care of before the service. *(This is good practice for school as well. Teachers know all about using the restroom as an excuse to move.)*

✚ **Whisper if you have to say something.** Be considerate of the others worshipping around you.

✚ **Stand when the congregation stands.** Be an active part of the service – and you get to move!

✚ **Fold your hands and listen quietly during prayer.** Some prayers are short and some are long, but all are important to God.

✚ **Go to the Children's Message ready to listen.** Leave any toys in the pew and don't chat with your friends!

✚ **Sit quietly, especially during the sermon.** Be considerate of the others worshipping around you, even when you are in the back during art response.



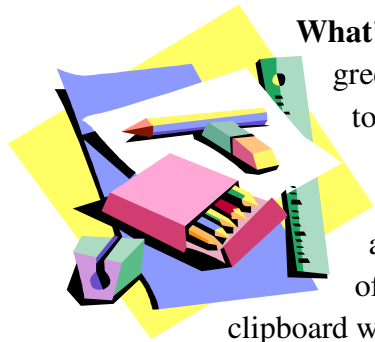
The following activities are ways that you can involve your child in the worship service. As you know, there are many differences in abilities and you may need to adapt some to fit the current needs of your child.

Church Family Prayers: Point out the prayer list to your child and include these people in your prayers at home. That way the names of people and their concerns will become familiar to your child and she will begin to develop a connection to these prayers during worship.



Baptismal Peek: Arrive early for worship some day and take your child into the sanctuary before most people arrive. Use the “church words” such as *sanctuary* and *pew* as you tour the area. Show your child the baptismal font and

explain/remind that this is the place where people are baptized. Mention his own baptism there, if appropriate. Show your child a cross, and explain that when people are baptized, the pastor makes the sign of the cross on their foreheads as a reminder that they are a child of God. Have your child dip his finger in the font before, during or after worship and make the sign of the cross on his forehead. Say together “Jesus loves me!”



What's Next? Use the bulletin or green/purple Worship Service cards to keep track of worship.

Encourage her to join in on congregational responses, stand and sit with the congregation and, of course, sing! Bring a small

clipboard with drawing paper and colored

pencils or crayons for your child to draw and “write” during the sermon (if they do not join the art response at the back of the sanctuary). Ask her to listen (to the best of her ability) and draw a picture of something that the pastor talks about. Write a note to the pastor on the drawing, offering thanks for sharing God’s message with your family.

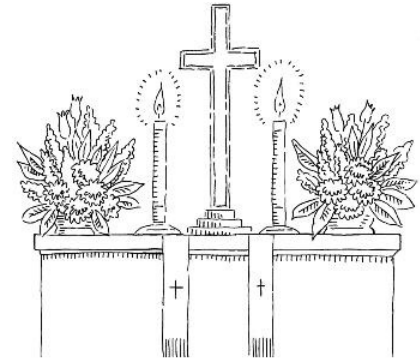
Easy Ins and Outs: Sit in a section of the church where it will be easy to exit and return. Our nursery is always available if you should need to calm a fussy child.

Music Rocks: Your child probably loves music and music is an important part of worship. Move together during the sung portions of the liturgy and hymns, point out the organist and choir or pianist and band. If possible, after the service, ask the musician if your child can look at the instrument and carefully touch it. You can even sing hymns and liturgy together at home to “practice.”



Sensory Language: Use the language of the senses when talking to your child before, during and after worship. Help her to softly touch a *banner* or *parament* (using those words when touching).

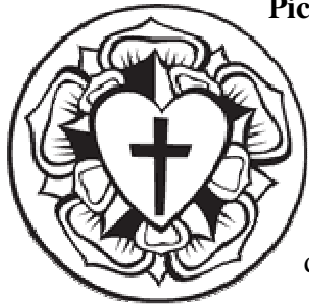
Touch his ears and say “listen to the organ play.” Point to her eyes and say “look at the candle flicker.” Touch her nose and say “smell the smoke” as the candle is put out or go to the *chancel* and smell the flowers.



Successful Snacks: We all know that children are always hungry. When planning snacks to quiet a hungry/restless child, think about bite-sized items that are not too messy and crumbly. Pack wipes for cleaning up, and teach your child respect for the sanctuary by doing a little cleanup in the pew when the service is over.



Thanks for Worship: Teach your child about how people care and help others by pointing out the worship leaders, choir director and the choir, the band and the pianist. Explain that these people are all helping you to worship and praise. Introduce her to the ushers, greeters, altar guild and **thank them** for their help.

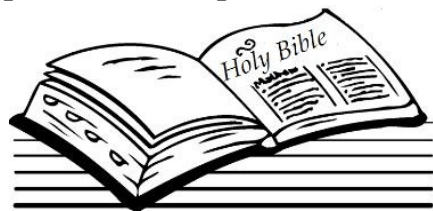


Pictures Teach: Point out to your child the symbols of the season that may be in the sanctuary during different seasons of the church year. Do you have any of these same symbols at home? Bring paper and crayons for your child to draw the symbols during worship.

Worship Words: Your child may not know the “church words” that identify parts of the church building and the worship service. Use and explain these words as you worship together: *God, love, Jesus, Bible, pray, baptized, church, narthex, sanctuary, pew, hymn, bulletin, communion, chalice, wafer, pastor, assisting minister, lector, acolyte, cross bearer, etc.* Use a reverent and loving tone of voice to convey the words’ importance.

The Bible is the Centerpiece of Worship:

Take your Bible or a children’s Bible to church with you. Point out the Bible that is used by the lector.



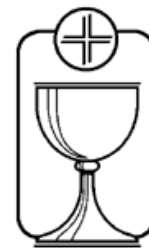
When it is time for the readings follow along in the Bible. Although your child may not be reading yet, you can help her understand what a book is, how to hold a book, and that God’s Word, the Bible, is a special book for God’s people.

Be Prepared! Worship includes long periods of inactivity. Pick up an Worship Bag from the narthex and/or pack a “church bag” that includes age appropriate, small, **quiet** toys or activities. Keep the bag in your car. Switch out the contents every few weeks to keep the items “fresh.”



(You could even theme the items including a book about Noah, small stuffed animals and animal crackers.)

One Big Family: Our culture tends to segregate by age, so worship is a wonderful time to celebrate God’s family. Be ready for questions about what’s going on in worship, the woman with a walker sitting next to you, etc... Not only will your child benefit, but those around will experience what Jesus meant when he said that children reflect God’s kingdom. Volunteer to be a greeter with your child and watch the smiles!



Church Family Meal: Even if your child is not yet communing, help them to learn by explaining what is going on. During the liturgy, watch the pastor and talk about the *bread* or the *wafers*, the *wine* and the *grape juice* – both are made from grapes! On the way to the altar, tell him that we are getting Jesus’ special meal – a gift from God! When you get back to the pew, say a prayer together, or talk about the meal and blessing. Be sure to talk to the pastor or children’s minister if you feel your child is ready to start communing.

Worship Surprises: Help your child celebrate festival Sundays (Christmas, Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost and Reformation) by talking about what's different in the sanctuary and watching for activities "out of the routine" such as palm branches, a fully lit Advent wreath, white drape on the cross, processions or a special message.



To and From Church Prayers: Have your family say a prayer on the way home from church. It can be as simple as "Thank you God for time to sing and pray each week" so young children will become familiar and will be able to join in. Older children may want to add things such as they are thankful for a Godly Play teacher, a friend or communion. A brief prayer in the pew before church can help your child focus. Try "Thank you God for worship time. Help us listen and pray and sing to you today."

Sharing the Peace: Have your child participate in the Sharing of the Peace. Show them how to shake hands or give a hug as a sign that we are happy to be together in God's family. Even the youngest child can learn to say peace! Older or shy children may not want to participate,



but help them to understand that this is a part of the worship – not just a time to visit with friends.



Admire the Art: Make sure that your child is aware of the art in the sanctuary. Before, during restless moments, or after the service take a closer look at the banners, art gallery, statues or other art, pointing out pictures or symbols.

Church Friends Book: Use the pictorial directory to help your child become familiar with their church family. Bring it to church and point to pictures and the people themselves. See if your child can find someone in the book. Call it "Our Church Friends Book" and it may even help you put some names to faces as well!

Bethlehem's Photo Directory



The following activities are things that you can do at home to prepare for worshipping together.

1 – 2 – 3 Offering: In an age appropriate manner, count your offering with your child. Have her count three pennies into the offering, or count up the amount in dollars, quarters, dimes, etc... She can help you place the envelope in the plate during the offering. Watch as the pastor receives the offering and offers/lifts the gifts to God.



Baptism Birthday Party:

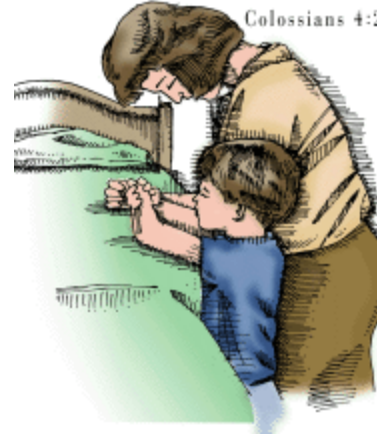
Each year celebrate the anniversary of new life with God! Invite godparents, pastors, special friends. Perhaps have a cake with blue (water colored) icing. Look at

photos. Light the baptismal candle. Say a special prayer thanking God for his new life as God’s child.

Practicing Worship: Help your child become familiar with the “routine” of worship by practicing at home during

Devote yourselves to prayer,
being watchful and thankful.

Colossians 4:2



the week. Talk about going to church and practice a quiet voice to use during a listening time. Practice responses such as “In Jesus’ name we pray,” followed by “Amen.” Or “Go in Peace to serve the Lord” followed by “Thanks be to God!” Practice folding hands and bowing your head during prayers.

My Worship Book: Make a picture book of worship. Use a digital camera to take unobtrusive (flash off) pictures during a typical worship service. Put the pictures in the correct order of worship in a small photo album, labeling them with simple titles such as “offering.” Bring the album to church for your child to use during worship to “keep track.”

