

# ST. ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Walking Together. Recognizing Jesus. Practicing Resurrection.*

## EXPLORING OUR FAITH

A Walk Through the Sunday Service  
Session 1 – Gathering in the Lord's Name

***This is the first installment in a series, adapted from notes in the Sunday bulletins at St. Andrew's, that is exploring our Sunday worship. What we do. How and why we do it. History, theology, the way worship connects us with the mystery of God in Jesus Christ. Questions and comments are welcome.***

**We gather in the Lord's Name.** On pages 400-01 of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer there is a helpful outline of the Eucharist service. It starts with "gathering in the Lord's Name." This first act of the Eucharist is sometimes called the "entry rite," and may consist of many elements: words spoken, prayers offered, music played and sung, movements of clergy and other ministers. All of these are summed up in what is called the Opening Acclamation, where the presider says, "Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," and the congregation responds, "And blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever."

The first part of the Acclamation is the "Lord's Name" part. "Blessed" here means the invocation of God's favor or presence. We begin the service by inviting God into our midst, by acknowledging his presence among us. The second part of the Acclamation is the "God's kingdom" part. God's kingdom here means us -- us and all Creation. But us and Creation not in ordinary secular terms, but as God's beloved possession. The Opening Acclamation reminds us that we have come apart from the ordinary world and from our separate everyday lives; we are here to be together in holy time and space with our Lord. We are here to regroup as holy people.

**Preparing to gather.** Maybe it's been a rush just to get here to church, to get children dressed and fed, get ourselves out the door. But if we can make time, it is good to do some preparation for worship before the service. What do we bring to worship, on our hearts and in our minds? What has gone on during the week? What do we want to get from this time apart? Comfort, courage, healing, inspiration, forgiveness, guidance? What do we have to give thanks for? What do we have to bring before Jesus? St. Augustine (354-430), one of the great figures in Christianity, wrote that "our heart is restless until it finds its rest in God." Being in touch with the restlessness of our heart, the ways in which it is not fulfilled by our often busy lives, is the best way to prepare for worship. If we can arrive a little early and settle into our seat while the prelude music plays, it is good to be still and get in touch with why we are here in this place.

In former times the "entry rite," as it was called, could be very elaborate, with processions, the chanting of psalms, a series of prayers said silently by the priest and acolyte at the Altar. All this helped

worshippers center themselves. One of these preparation prayers remains in the Prayer Book liturgy and can be useful to pray privately – the Collect for Purity:

Almighty God,  
to you all hearts are open, all desires known,  
and from you no secrets are hid:  
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy Name;  
through Christ our Lord.