

WORSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

I. The earliest church before Constantine (100–300 A. D.)

- Liturgical space: Churches in **homes** and (later) homes converted to churches. **Paintings** on walls depicting biblical history and heaven (ascended Jesus reigning with angels and saints of all ages) for purposes of instruction and beauty.
- Order of worship: Justin Martyr's outline (p. 2). Note the weekly balance of the ministry of the word (reading and preaching of scripture) and the Lord's Supper. The focus was receiving and celebrating the ministry of the risen Lord through his word and at his table on the day of his resurrection (Sunday/the Lord's Day).
- Music: Christian **hymns** appeared very early (e.g., Odes of Solomon before 125 A.D.). **Psalms** were sung responsorially (soloists alternating with the congregation singing repeated short refrains) or antiphonally (alternating between two halves of the congregation). **No musical instruments** due to strong associations with immorality of Greco-Roman festivals.
- Posture: Prayers were offered **standing**, often with **arms upraised**. In many places, kneeling was forbidden on the Lord's Day because it was to be a day of joyful celebration.
- Calendar: The **Lord's Day** was the day of Christian worship. **Easter** was celebrated by 2nd century.

II. The early church after Constantine (300–500 A. D.)

- Liturgical space: Large **basilicas** in larger towns and cities to accommodate larger assemblies.
- Order of worship: The various elements and order of the liturgy became fuller, more elaborate, and more expressive, theologically, rhetorically, and ritually.
 - New fixed forms
 - **Responses/dialogues**: Greetings, "One is holy..."
 - **Hymns** and other sung refrains (see italicized titles in the charts on p. 2)
 - **Nicene Creed**: Added to eastern liturgies in the 5th century.
 - **Collects**: Short prayers to conclude processions and chants within the liturgy.
 - **Litanies**: Petitions with repeated parts for the whole congregation to speak together. These prayers became more developed in content and became more formalized in order to facilitate participation by the people.
 - **Lord's Prayer**
 - **Eucharistic prayers** (prayers of thanksgiving prior to communion) became very elaborate and fixed in structure and content. In eastern traditions, they acquired a Trinitarian shape and creed-like structure in offering thanks for all that God has done in creation and redemption in Christ and asking the Holy Spirit to bless communion so that the church might fully receive Christ in the Supper.
 - **Convergence**: The liturgies of **Jerusalem, Rome, and Constantinople** became the most influential patterns for the Christian world due to their size and highly respected leadership.
 - **Growing maturity**: The church matured in her understanding and articulation of biblical theology, and this manifested itself in liturgical texts that were increasingly substantive and comprehensive in theological expression, e.g., creeds, systematic annual plans for scripture reading (lectionaries),
- Music: **Almost exclusively psalms** (except for a few hymns) during worship on the Lord's Day in order to prevent spread of false doctrine via hymns. (Hymns were sung in the daily worship of large churches and monastic communities.)
- Calendar: By the end of the fourth century, the church had universally adopted an **annual calendar** including Christmas; Epiphany; Lent (40 days), concluding with Holy Week (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday); Easter (50 days), concluding with Ascension (40 days after Easter Sunday) and Pentecost (50 days after Easter Sunday). This practice was an adaptation of the pattern of the annual calendar in the Old Testament, and it served to keep the church grounded in the life and ministry of Jesus as the foundation of the church and the center of the scriptures and of all of creation and history.

Justin Martyr (2nd Century)	Western Liturgy [Latin] (Rome: 4th-8th Century)	Eastern Liturgy [Greek] (Constantinople: 5th-6th Century)
Gathering	<p>Priest's <u>procession</u> with</p> <p>Introit psalm(s) <i>Kyrie</i> : "Lord/Christ have mercy" (5th cent.) <i>Gloria in excelsis</i> hymn (6th cent.)</p>	<p>Church's <u>procession</u> into building</p> <p>Psalms with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Trisagion</i> hymn refrain (5th cent.) • <i>Ho Monogenes</i> hymn refrain (6th cent.)
	<p>Greeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priest: "The Lord be with you" • People: "And with your spirit" <p>(at least by early 5th cent.)</p>	<p>Greeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priest: "Peace be with you" • People: "And with your spirit"
	Collect prayer (5th cent.)	
OT and/or NT Reading	(OT Reading, not Rome or Africa)	Psalm (sung responsorially)
	Epistle Reading	Epistle Reading
	Psalm (sung responsorially)	Alleluia
	Gospel Reading	Gospel Reading
	(Nicene Creed in Gaul in 794)	
Sermon	(Sermon: omitted by 8th cent.)	(Sermon: omitted by 8th cent.)
		Prayers of Supplication
Dismissal of Catechumens	Dismissal of Catechumens	Dismissal of Catechumens
Intercessory Prayers	Intercessory Prayers	(Intercessory Prayers)
Kiss of Peace		
Offerings of bread and wine	<u>Procession</u> with bread and wine with Psalm	<u>Procession</u> with bread and wine with Psalm + Cherubic hymn refrain
	Offertory Prayer(s)	Offertory Prayer(s)
		Kiss of Peace
	(Nicene Creed: in Milan)	Nicene Creed (6th cent.)
Eucharistic Prayer	Eucharistic Prayer (Canon)	Eucharistic Prayer (Anaphora)
	Lord's Prayer (5th cent.?)	Prayers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Litany of petitions • Lord's Prayer (late 4th cent.) • Prayer of Inclination (with bowed heads) for blessing of the people through communion
	Kiss of peace	
	Fraction (ceremonial breaking of bread) with singing of Agnus Dei (late 7th cent.)	Fraction & Prayer of Elevation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bishop: "The holy things for the holy people" • People: "One is holy, one is Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father"
Communion	Communion <u>procession</u> with psalms and hymns sung	Communion <u>procession</u> with psalms and hymns sung
Giving of tithes and offerings		
	Prayer of thanksgiving	Prayer of Thanksgiving
	Benediction & Dismissal	Benediction & Dismissal