

“In the Name of the Father . . .”

How does the Divine Service, the Order of Holy Communion, begin? What are the words?

“In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” A simple phrase. It’s not even a full sentence. (Where is the subject? Where is the verb?) That’s odd, or is it?

These words recall our baptism into Christ. It was there in Holy Baptism that God first put His name put on us. It was there that God came to us through the water and the Word and made us His children. It was there that our life in Christ our Savior began.

Notice that the Service does *not* start with the words, “*We begin* in the Name . . .” Many people today seem to think that because *we* have gathered here to do something that *we* are not going to begin doing it. But *we* do not begin. We cannot. We are (as we have so often confessed) “poor, sinful human beings.” *God* begins.

Of Baptism, Martin Luther wrote, “. . . Baptism is not a work which we do but is a treasure which God gives us and faith grasps, just as the Lord Christ upon the cross is not a work but a treasure comprehended and offered to us in the Word and received by faith” (from *The Large Catechism*).

So Baptism is not our work. It is a gift of God. It is a gift which “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare” (*Small Catechism*).

In the same way, the Divine Service is not our work. We can do nothing in our worship or praise of God but for the fact that God has first done something for us: He has saved us sinners through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. God has made us His own through Holy Baptism.

Therefore, *we* do not begin this Service. God begins it in His own Name. What a gracious God! He takes no chances, even when we worship Him, and He begins our praise Himself!

And yet, the Church has not chosen to say something like, “God begins this Service in the Name . . .” For as the baptized people of God, we have been gathered to hear and receive from God, and we are the ones praying pray to Him and praising Him.

Recognizing this, the Church has chosen to leave off subjects and verbs that might point us too exclusively in one direction or the other. Instead, the first words of the Divine Service avoid highlighting anything we have done and give honor to the God who has gathered us, who feeds and strengthens us with Word and Sacrament, who empowers us in our prayers and praises, and who sends us out to live out His gifts in the world.

Not only the Divine Service, then, but each and every day of our lives should start in this way, recognizing God’s great service to us and our humble service back to the God who has created us, redeemed us, and sanctifies us. “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Amen! “It shall be so!” Amen!