

Guide to Worship

or

What we do at St Nick's!



Why do we worship?

Worship is our natural and free response as humans to our Creator. It is our response to beauty, love, adoration, our deepest fears and sorrow, and our greatest joys. In worship, we unite and are brought together in common action.

All people know of the existence of God, just as a child knows that she has biological parents, even if she has never met them. Worship is one of the ways in which we try and strengthen our relationship with God.

In the Bible we read about the history of the people of God, and at every stage in our journey it has involved worship, especially when we are trying to return to him after wandering away. But God revealed himself more fully to us in Jesus Christ, and through him we recognize God amongst us.

What happens at St Nick's?

Liverpool Parish Church sits clearly in the tradition of worship which has developed in the last two thousand years. There are some hallmarks of this which you will see in our Sunday morning service:

Candles are burning on the altar. They are a symbol of the light of Christ (John 8.12) and set apart the space we use for worship.

Incense is used at many of our services, reminding us of Jewish worship in the Old Testament ("Let my prayer rise before you as incense" - Psalm 141), but also of the Roman world, in which Christianity first flourished, where incense was used as a mark of honour.

Vestments are worn by the clergy. They remind us of the style of clothing worn in the time of Jesus, but they also show us that the clergy are not leading worship as individual men and women, but as priests who have been given a special function in our worship.

Singing takes place at various parts of the service, and not just in the singing of hymns. This is a form of prayer in itself, and it reminds us that our worship is a little bit different from the normal words we exchange with each other every day.

What is special about a ‘Eucharist’?

On Sunday mornings the worship at St Nick’s is always a ‘Eucharist’. This means ‘thanksgiving’, but the service is also known as the Holy Communion, the Mass, or the Lord’s Supper. It recalls the night before Jesus died when he was at supper with his friends, and this is often associated with the Jewish Passover meal. He took the bread and wine at the meal, blessed it, and said, “This is my body; “this is my blood.” It both foreshadowed his death the following day, and taught Christians how to worship by sharing in the life of Jesus and sharing with each other. In Communion, we remember Christ’s sacrifice, death, and resurrection. A line which we sometimes use in the service is “Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread.”

Who can receive the bread and the wine in the Eucharist?

We all join in the worship in the service, but usually only those who have received some form of preparation or instruction receive Communion. The Church of England used to restrict Communion to those who have been Confirmed by a Bishop: this is still usually the case for adults, but today children are often admitted to Communion before Confirmation. But the Church of England is part of a worldwide church, and if you normally receive Communion in your own church, then you are welcome to do so here. If you are unsure then please speak to the clergy.

When do we stand, kneel, or sit during the service?

The simple answer is that you must do what you feel most comfortable doing! You will see that most of the congregation will adopt the same posture, and there are some directions in the order of service, but each of us will have our own preferences.

Some people make the sign of the cross. What does this mean?

At some points in the service, especially the absolution and the blessing, or whenever the Trinity is mentioned (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) we make the sign of the cross across our bodies. This is a way of making the prayer our own by ‘blessing’ ourselves with the cross.

Is everything in the order of service?

The order of service you receive is fairly comprehensive, but you will learn most by watching, listening, and joining in with the clergy, and with those sitting near you. During the intercessions there are sometimes prayers which are not printed. The most common ones are after the prayers for the departed:

Leader: Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord.

All: And let light perpetual shine upon them.

and also the Hail Mary:

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

What about children?

Children are very welcome at St Nick's. On the first Sunday of the month we have 'Sunday School', aimed at children over the age of three. But every Sunday we have books and colouring available for children who are not enthralled by the sermon or the prayers. But even if your child doesn't appear to be showing much interest in the service, our experience is that children are listening and participating all the time, and if you talk about the service afterwards they might surprise you! If your child is very small and you feel they are unsettled, there is a carpet with soft toys for them and chairs for adults in the Narthex (the 'foyer' area of the Church). You would still be able to see, hear and participate in the service, but please rejoin the rest of the congregation when you are ready.

I've got some other questions as well...

We never run out of questions, so you could try them out on someone who looks as if they have been attending St Nick's for longer than you have. But please do throw your questions at the clergy as well: no question is too trivial to ask!