

Why Do We Sing In Church?

What Do We Mean By A 'Time Of Worship' (sung worship)

Music touches our deeper emotions and unites us in ways that no other art form can accomplish. There is a unique God-given dynamic in music, particularly sacred music, which can enable us to draw close to God when we choose to enter in to the moment and the journey. A transforming power of the Holy Spirit can so often inhabit simple words, texts and beautiful melodies. Each of us will have our own preferences, of course; we all have a 'heart language' or our 'go-to' music which brings us joy, comforts us in sorrow, and leads us to enjoy times of celebration. It can also enable us to connect with God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in a beautiful, unique and personal way. Music can provide a soundtrack for many areas of our lives, in different times and places, and never more so than in the precious moments of singing music with deep Spiritual meanings and resonance. Some people prefer classical music, traditional church music, Psalms, sung Liturgy and hymns. Others like modern music in all its forms and styles, and may prefer charismatic expressions of sung worship & praise.

1) The word **Worship** essentially means '**worth-ship**'. Giving value and appreciation to someone or something. So often we talk about 'a wonderful time of worship' when what we really mean is that we experienced profound Spiritual communion with God during a time of singing and in a worship service. The music and singing is only one part of the worship service. As we worship God, in whose image we are made, we not only grow Spiritually, but we also become more fully human. As we draw close and enter in to deeper worship, we also discover the priorities of God's heart.

Exodus 20: v.3, 4 & 5 "*You shall have no other Gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol.. ..you shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I the Lord Your God am a jealous God*" God gives us this guidance for our benefit, because He loves and delights in us. Uncontrolled false worship results in obsession, addiction and disaster. It damages us, and others. We often hear stories reported in the news of obsessive personalities, those who stalk film stars, or who become infatuated by people, drugs, alcohol or possessions. It is easy for our worship to become misplaced. There is nothing wrong with appreciating the blessings of this life. It is when something, or someone, takes on an obsessive overwhelming priority for us that we go astray. Anything that replaces God as the central truth, reality and foundation in our lives is called an idol.

The **New Testament** in **Matthew 6: v.33** says "*seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well...*" We are called to put God first. What are the idols of our age that the media and our culture tempt us to worship? It is all the obvious things; money, wealth, power, status, fame, beauty, food, sex, drink, drugs, worldly success.

As we study scripture, we see that **sung worship is Biblical**. The universe is filled with sound, and music and singing is evident in God's creation from the very beginning of time. **Zephaniah 3: v.17** "*The LORD your God is with you, (the One who saves). He will take great delight in you; in His love He will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.*" We see Saul being calmed, brought peace, and the evil spirits departing, through David's playing of the harp/lyre as described in **1 Samuel 16:23**. We enter into the worship of heaven when we

sing and make music to God.

We also see from Scripture that music was played, and songs & hymns were sung at important times throughout the history of God's people, in both the Old and New Testaments. For instance, the Song Of Moses And Miriam (Exodus 15) , The Song of Deborah (in the book of Judges 5:2-31) Mary's Song (The Magnificat) or Simeon's song (The Nunc Dimittis). The book of **The Psalms** is essentially the worship songbook of the people of Israel. A book of sung prayers, songs of Ascent, songs and prayers of petition and thanks, as well as the deeply personal songs of David. Many of the Psalms call us to '*Sing joyfully to the Lord.*' **Psalm 33: v.3** '*Sing to the Lord a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.*' There are some eighty-five exhortations to sing praise to the Lord in the Scriptures.

In the New Testament, **Ephesians 5: v.19** Paul says '*...be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father at all times for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...*'

2) Why do we have a 'Time Of Worship' (sung worship)

It takes time for us to enter into the presence of God. I know this has Theological implications, because if God is always present, how can He be any *more* present? But I think it is more about how God chooses to reveal Himself uniquely to each of us, and how we respond. We can observe these instances of revelation throughout the scriptures. (The burning bush, the pillar of fire, Jacob wrestling with God, the call of Elisha). He reveals Himself uniquely to each of us.

We are often distracted when we arrive at church. So we begin with a **Call to worship**, an encouragement to choose to enter in. And then we move through **Praise, Thanksgiving, Adoration, Supplication to Response in Obedience**. For example, beginning with the call to worship (*Come now is the time to worship*) to singing God's Praise (*Here is Love... We forever sing His praise*) through thanksgiving (*Thank You for saving me*) to Adoration & and Worship (*May Our Attitude be as that of Christ*) to Supplication (*Bring Your healing power*) and then response in obedience (*I will offer up my life in Spirit and truth....All to Jesus I surrender*) The words of the songs and hymns reflect that journey. We go from singing in the *third* person, to the *first* person. Something noticeably changes as we draw close and move from singing *about* God, to God.

It is a musical and Spiritual journey. This journey takes place to a greater or lesser degree at various times throughout the worship service, especially as we move toward the intimacy of Holy Communion.

It can be likened to the courts of the **Old Testament Temple**. Firstly, there were the outer Gates, then the Barriers through into the Court of the Gentiles, and the Court of Women. Next was the Court of the Israelites leading to the Court of the Priests. This led to the Holy Place. No one, other than the High Priest, could go any further. The mysterious central court, separated from the rest of the temple by a veil, was the Holy of Holies. The High Priest could only enter once a year on the Day of Atonement. The veil in front of the Holy of Holies prevented access to the presence of God by ordinary worshippers. The priest went to God and made the many sacrifices to God on behalf of the people for their sin and that of the nation.

At the crucifixion, during the violent earthquake that followed, the veil of the temple was torn in two. Symbolically this emphasizes that we *all* have access to the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. And we are called to take responsibility for our Spiritual journey.

Christ came to restore the broken relationship between God and His people, to heal the lost intimacy between God and His people. It is the central message of the New Testament. Jesus illustrated this best in the story of the **Prodigal Son**. We are now living under the **New Covenant**. Christ offered *Himself* as the perfect sacrifice, once, and for all time, for *all* of us. There was now no need for the high priest to continually offer sacrifices in the temple for sin. King David, a 'man after God's own heart' understood this requirement of the God whom he loved and who loved him. **Psalm 51: v.16** "*You do not delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart you will not despise*". It is a journey from lip service and outward legalism, to inward obedience, born out of love, that we pray will become evident in our lives as we grow Spiritually. God promised to write His law upon our hearts, and to show each of us the way. **Jeremiah 31:33**

In worship, there is a two-fold dynamic taking place: We give to God and He gives to us. We are giving God time to speak to us, guide us, strengthen, heal and restore us, as we offer ourselves in worship. It is an act of our will. Not just in church, but in our lives, our daily decisions. Thus we follow Christ's call to become people who represent the love and peace of God. To model His Kingdom, here on earth. We sing songs and hymns which are culturally acceptable, and able to communicate with those whom we are called to serve, to enable a wide gathering of tastes and preferences to enter into the sung worship of God. We are also to impart the message of the Gospel to a new generation as we have been asked to do by our Lord. We include the treasures of the past as well as the new musical expressions of the present. (If you look at the citations in the bulletin, you can see the widely differing dates and selections made that span the rich traditions of our Anglican hymnody and song.)

It must be remembered that we are in a Spiritual battle, which is why we need God, by the power and presence of His Spirit, to inhabit our praise and worship and guide us through our journey of life. We have a spiritual enemy who seeks to discredit the name of God, to destroy us, and our relationships with each other, with God, our Christian witness, our walk, our communities, marriages and families.

John 10: v.10 *...the thief come to kill and destroy, but I have come to give you life.* **Ephesians 6: v. 12** *....Our battle is not with flesh and blood, but with the principalities and powers, the dark forces of this age*

3) There is only one true worship leader, and that is Jesus Christ. Our role, as His servants (and of course in our tradition, the Priest is the leader of worship), and my task as a worship leader and choir director, is similar to that of an usher at a wedding, where the focus is on the bride and bridegroom. Or perhaps a signpost on the interstate on the way to a beautiful holiday destination; you don't relax on the beach talking about how wonderful the signposts were, however much we appreciate the guidance along the way! We enjoy the destination. Similarly, the worship leader, or music director helps to point the way to Jesus. The sacred music we sing and the purpose of sacred music itself is to help us on our journey of transformation as we permit God to speak to our hearts, to reveal His love, challenge us, heal and transform us. And the flow of the singing and the subject matter, where the music

relates to and supports the theme of the service and the Biblical texts, also prepares our hearts for the Spiritual journey that is taking place within a worship service. Martin Luther was of the opinion that “to sing is to pray twice”.

Romans 12: v.1-2 *‘...therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is your true and proper worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds..’* The unreserved offering of our hearts and lives

John 4: v.23 & 24 Worship in Spirit & Truth. The call to inner obedience resulting in sanctified outward behavior, not dependent on location or ritual.

There is a notice over the West door at the back of a church near where my parents live in Oxfordshire: THE SERVICE IS OVER. LET THE WORSHIP BEGIN.