

# We Learn to Worship

**W**hat is worship? To the Christian, it is a reverent response in thought, word, and deed to our Lord. Worship is not for us, the people, but it is our service directed toward God through our words and actions of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and commitment.

Worship consists of each person's individual thoughts and actions, usually combined in a group experience.

Both the Old and New Testaments include illustrations about the importance of involvement of children in the life of the community.

Children can be engaged in worship in a variety of ways that teach them both the *importance* of worship and the *behavior* of worship.

Throughout the church year, we make room for children in worship because we want our children to store up memorable, shared experiences of their Christian family. We want our children to be enriched by the beauty of music as an expression of praise to God, to hear the stories of our faith from the Bible, and to begin to see worship as a time and place where God speaks—even to children.

When children witness the drama of baptism and the Lord's Supper they see signs of God's goodness and love. In worship, they begin to put together the pieces of who God is and what God has done in Jesus. They take steps toward claiming the faith as their own, toward embracing the love God has for each one of God's children, no matter his or her age.

## Younger Children in Worship

Parents may wonder at the wisdom of including preschoolers in worship. Preschoolers may be restless, distract those around them or embarrass their parents with their behavior. The preschooler comes to worship with:

- A rather limited attention span
- A seemingly unlimited amount of energy
- A growing curiosity about everything.

**With your Preschooler, try these helpful steps:**

- Sit near the front where your preschooler can clearly see the platform
- Prepare your preschooler for the different parts of the worship service
- Explain special events ahead of time and answer questions that need an answer in a quiet whisper
- Help your child by explaining the Children's Sermon as a special time for her or him. Some children find it helpful to meet our pastor for a brief visit in the sanctuary on a day other than Sunday so they can know what to expect. Feel free to call the office to set up at time to visit!

## Older Children in Worship

Older children bring abilities and age-appropriate competencies to the experience of worship, like:

- A greater capacity for attentive listening
- An increasing ability to read
- The ability to organize and memorize information

- A growing ability to recognize the importance of metaphors and symbols of faith and to decode these for meaning, and
- An increasing understanding of who God is, how they should relate to God and how to respond to the gift of grace of Jesus.

With your older child, try these helpful steps:

- Invite your child to follow the reading of the Scripture in their own Bible.
- Find the words in hymns and songs and explain their meaning.
- Encourage your child to listen to the sermon for stories that illustrate the message.
- Understand worship is best "caught" by children when taught by parents and families who model worship.
- Sit together during worship.
- Model and explain the difference between "coming to church" and "coming to worship."
- Share the joy of worship with your child.
- Embrace the understanding that worship is the most important action you can ever teach your child to do. Remember, God's children will worship now and forever.
- Train your child to worship, not just to be quiet.
- **All adults** in the church share the responsibility of helping children learn how to worship God. It's okay to ask for help!



**Resource.** This brochure is based, in part, on the book, *Parenting in the Pew*, available in the Church Office.

## 12 More Ways to Enhance Your Family's Experience of Worship

1. Explain expectations at home and discuss consequences. Be consistent with discipline if behavior is not appropriate.
2. Visit the restroom and get water between Sunday School and the Worship Service, never during unless it is an emergency.
3. Teach your child to use a quiet whisper to talk to you during the Worship Service.
4. Encourage your child to stand and sit with the congregation, when appropriate.
5. To help them feel a part of the service, allow your child to hold the hymnal and Bible.
6. Provide a "Worship Bag" for your child with her or his Bible and a pencil or pen, colored pencils, chenille stems, offering envelope, blank notepad for drawing, lined paper for writing worship words, "thank you" or "I prayed for you" notes to others. Watch for different and interesting items to put in your child's bag. Rotate items occasionally and only use the items on Sunday's to keep them special. (Avoid electronic games and gadgets.) The Church Office can provide a bag to get you started. Just stop by!
7. Arrive in time to find a good place to sit. Sit near the front to provide younger children with a better view of the platform.

8. Clue your child about what will happen next in worship. Consider giving your child a pencil to mark off each part of the service as it occurs.
9. Discuss worship to prepare children for any change in the routine, such as baptism or other special features. Also, take time to answer questions about worship experiences.
10. Express your gladness at having children in worship. After the service, be sure to welcome the children near you. Include them in your conversations to let them know they belong.
11. Teach respectful discipline in children's behavior during worship but remember children are still learning. Practice grace.
12. Do the "Children's Bulletin" together!

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*Parents and other adults must lead children into meaningful participation in worship.*

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# Including Children in Worship



- Making the Transition to "Big Church" for Preschoolers
- Helping Older Children Experience Meaningful Worship

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Conway, South Carolina