

WHAT'S HOLY COMMUNION ALL ABOUT?

In the Jewish religion children are heavily involved, particularly at home, in their religious ceremonies: doing things and asking questions. So today we are going to talk our way through a Communion celebration, with the children, and I hope that at the end you will all feel able to come up and take Communion. The church has guidelines about who should and should not take Communion; today is a different sort of service from normal, and all children and adults are welcome.

What do you think is the most important part of our normal Communion service? There is no correct answer. But the main parts of the service are: the Confession, Absolution, prayer, praise, the Creed, Bible readings, a sermon explaining them, the Peace, and Communion. Some of you particularly mentioned the taking of Communion, an individual act, but done altogether. In particular, in the service there is the chance to put ourselves right with God and with each other; Matthew 5:23-24 explains this.

Do you think of the Holy Communion part of the service as a celebration? The official name for the person leading that part of the service is often "Celebrant". That doesn't mean that it's got to be all loud and jolly, but it should be joyful!. What do we do in this church to try to make it special? It takes part in a different part of the church, up at the altar, we sing parts of the service, and we all get up out of our places and go up to the top to take Communion.

The Last Supper took place on a Thursday, the night before Jesus died. But it was already a special meal: the Passover meal. This meal remembered when God brought the Jewish people out of Egypt thousands of years before Jesus; He brought them out of slavery, into freedom. That's similar to what Jesus has done for us, the Bible says: rescuing us from being slaves of sin, forgiving us, making us free. So the Passover meal and Holy Communion remember God doing a similar thing for his people. Our Holy Communion service, therefore, is a bit like Remembrance Sunday when we remember people who have died recently in Afghanistan and other conflicts, but we also go back further and remember people who died in the Falklands, World War II and World War I. Similarly, at Holy Communion we remember what Jesus did for us, but we go further back too, to what God did for the Jews

thousands of years before: God is always in the business of rescuing and helping us. And what things did they eat at that Passover meal? Unleavened bread (because there was no time to let the yeast work in the dough), which is why we use unleavened wafers at Communion in this church; and lamb. And blood from the lamb had to be daubed on the Israelites' doors so that God would protect them. Interestingly, the original Passover meal in Egypt and Jesus' first meal with the disciples on Maundy Thursday both occurred just before the events they celebrate.

So we bring up the bread and the wine to thank God for what He's done. Then I lead a prayer to remember what Jesus did. It was during the Passover meal that Jesus took the bread and told them to eat it to remember Him. Later He took the wine; the Bible tells us that it was at the end of the Passover meal that he did this. Now Jews drink four cups of wine during the Passover meal, to recall different things, and the last one is called the Cup of Blessing, but it is also called the Cup of Anger: maybe Jesus is saying, "I will drink the cup of God's anger for your sin, so that you can drink the cup of blessing from God."

A few last points:

* Why did Jesus want us to eat the bread and drink the wine? Why not just do it himself and tell us to remember that? What difference does it make for us to do the eating and drinking?

* This idea of symbolically drinking blood is entirely new and must have horrified the disciples; Jews drain the blood from meat before cooking it. Of course, at the Passover the Jews were protected by the blood; we, too, are protected by Jesus' death, his blood shed for us.

* How do you think God wants us to feel as we come up to take Communion?

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