



THE PASTOR'S PEN

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Why are We Having a Christian Seder on Maundy Thursday?

Passover is the oldest and the most important religious festival in Judaism. It is a commemoration of God's deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery when "The Destroyer" came upon the land of Egypt and killed all the firstborns except for those in the homes which had the lamb's blood on their door posts and lintel. What most folks do not realize is that what we call Passover today is actually two different festivals that occur at the same time. These are The Feast of Unleavened Bread and The Passover.

The festival of Passover, known to the Jews as [Pesach](#), begins at sunset on the 14th of Nisan and marks the beginning of a seven day celebration that includes the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The focal point of Passover is a communal meal, called the Seder (the Hebrew work for "order." It is called this because there is an exact, fixed order of service), which is a time of rejoicing and celebration because of the deliverance of the Hebrews that God accomplished in the exodus. Sometimes the meals during the entire period of Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread are referred to as Seder meals and are called the first Seder, the Second Seder, etc., though only the first two nights are traditionally considered Seder meals.

Unlike most of the Christian holy days that are observed in Church, Passover has been celebrated in the home with family and friends since the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70. It is customary to invite guests to share the Seder meal, especially newcomers to the community. The actual Seder meal in most Jewish homes today is an elaborate feast, with food, games for the children, telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt and even songs. It is not unusual for a traditional Seder to last as long as six hours and sometimes even longer.

An important point that needs to be made is that Passover is really more than a religious festival. It is an elaborate teaching experience, especially for the children and newcomers. It is intended to call people together to remember their identity as the People of God. By using all of the physical senses, the Passover Seder tells the story of God's grace in history and calls the participants to experience and share in the story as their own story.

Passover becomes more than simply a service or a time of the year; it becomes a way to confess our faith in the One who has acted in history to redeem His people. It also expresses the hope that He will continue to act in bringing deliverance to all people everywhere. In fact, the Passover is not just about what God did to physically deliver the Jewish people from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. It is also a prophetic telling through type and shadow of how God intends to deliver all of Humanity from the slavery of sin and death.

There has been an increasing interest among Christians in celebrating this ancient festival for several decades now. There are various reasons for this renewed interest such as: an increasing sensitivity to different cultures and a corresponding desire to learn about them; a renewed awareness of the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures as a part of the Christian traditions; a desire or even a need in our modern world to recover a sense of the sacred through

liturgy and sacrament; the willingness to find new and innovative ways to worship; and perhaps even the enjoyment that comes from sharing in the continuity of worship and celebration with a 3,000 year old community of faith.

As a result, there has been an explosion of interest in extending the teachings of the Passover festival to teach the reason for the incarnation and to explain God's eternal plan for the redemption of Humanity. Our goal here in presenting a Christian continuance of Passover is to retain the theological, confessional, and educational dimensions of the service. That is, it is presented as a way for people of the Christian Faith to express that faith in the context of a gathered community by participating symbolically in the story of salvation. The service is presented very deliberately and purposefully as a Christian service, with no apologies. Yet, there has also been a deliberate attempt to preserve the spirit of the Jewish traditions and Jewish experience in the service; and to respect the faith journey of the Jewish people across the centuries. For that reason, apart from the fact that it will likely be Christians who are participating in the service, the thoroughly Christian dimension will come at the end of the service. After all, that is really how God chose to work in history: with the Jews first, and then also with the rest of the world!

It is the hope of the Worship Committee that you will join us for this year's pot luck and Seder service on Thursday evening, March 28th. We hope that you will enjoy the food and fellowship, but also hope that you will get to experience your faith and understand a little more of how God has been at work in the history of humanity since the Creation. Do not forget to call the church office or sign up this week and let us you know you are coming so that we can have everything ready for you.

Shalom,

James

