

## INTRODUCTION

**P**assover is the great Jewish feast of redemption and liberation, the memorial of the Israelites' deliverance from their bondage in Egypt. The word Passover means "deliverance," since in the story of the Exodus Yahweh "passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt" (Ex. 12:27). Passover is also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, since in their haste to flee Egypt, "the people carried off their dough, still unleavened" (Ex. 12:34). The lamb offered at each paschal meal recalls the first Passover sacrifice, whose blood protected the Israelites from the avenging angel of Yahweh (cf. Ex. 12:21-33). Passover is a festival of great rejoicing, which reveals how God "led us from captivity to freedom, from sadness to joy, from mourning to feasting, from servitude to redemption, from darkness to brilliant light."



## THE SEDER MEAL

The ritual meal which commemorates the events of the Exodus is called the Seder.



The primary aim of the Seder is to transmit to future generations the story of the Exodus, the central event in Jewish history. But the universality becomes evident as we all find ourselves in bondage at one time or another. **Children are not only welcome, they are necessary, as this ritual is for them!** Ideally, a family might gather around a table in its own home to celebrate the Seder, sharing in a meal which symbolizes their consciousness as a people and their faith in the future. The Exodus story pertains to all persons, since it tells of the right of all persons to live as God's free people.

## CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE

In the Christian tradition, the Passover Seder is also believed to be when Jesus instituted the Eucharist. Gathered around the supper table with his disciples, Jesus told them, "I have longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; because, I tell you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

Then, taking a cup, he gave thanks and said, 'Take this and share it among you, because from now on, I tell you, I shall not drink wine until the kingdom of God comes'.

Then he took some bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which will be given for you; do this as a memorial of me'. He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you.'" (Luke 22:15-20)



## SHOULD CHRISTIANS ENACT THE SEDER MEAL ON MAUNDY THURSDAY?

This is not without controversy.

Many Jews would say that Christians hosting their own Seder rips the tradition out of context, objectifies Jews, disrespectfully appropriates Judaism, and projects Christian theological understandings [Christ as the Passover Lamb] upon Hebrew scripture. Evangelical Christians sometimes impose reinterpretations of Jewish traditions—including “Christian Seders” — in attempts to proselytize and justify sectarian doctrine. For many Jews, the memories of crusades, pogroms, “Jew hunting” as an Easter practice, and other virulent anti-Semitism loom large. The swastika is a gammadion cross. Why should Judaism permit the appropriation of this key existential ritual to Christians?

Many Christians object that as the Seder is a festal celebration, it has no place in Holy Week. Others argue that Christianity supersedes Judaism and all its customs. The Belgic Confession states, “*The ceremonies and symbols of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and all the shadows are accomplished; so that the use of them must be abolished among Christians.*” And the Westminster Confession posits that though the gospel sacraments are “*fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them [Christ the substance] is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles.*”

## THE SEDER AT ST. THOMAS’ THIS YEAR

Participating in the *Jewish Seder* as a *Christian* was an experience made possible to me by a young rabbi I trained with at Children’s Hospital in Cincinnati back in the 1980’s. The *Haggadah*<sup>1</sup> she taught me to use was published by the Jewish Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith and the Archdiocese of Chicago. It is not a “Christianized” Seder. But it was intentionally compiled with an eye toward the experiential inclusion of Christians, and particularly recovering the intent of teaching the

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<sup>1</sup> The *Haggadah* (Hebrew: הַגְּדָה, "telling") is a Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder. Reading the *Haggadah* at the Seder table is a fulfillment of the Scriptural commandment to each Jew to "tell your son" of the Jewish liberation from slavery in Egypt as described in the Book of Exodus in the Torah ("And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the LORD did for me when I came forth out of Egypt." Ex. 13:8.

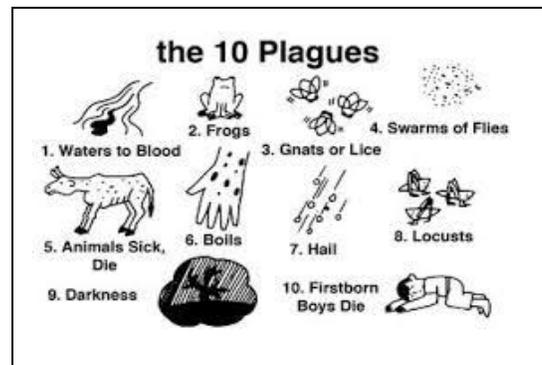
Passover story to children. Sadly, it is no longer in print, and the inclusive vision behind it, has fallen out of favor.<sup>2</sup>

So, on the night of March 24<sup>th</sup>, Maundy Thursday, those so desiring will gather in the undercroft at 6pm. Using long preserved copies of the *Haggadah* entrusted to me, we will mindfully and respectfully manifest the Seder meal. It will be a long meal, maybe a couple hours. It will be informal and relaxed. The children will fade in and out, appearing for the important ritual parts.

We will eat, we will drink our four cup of wine, we will sing, we will teach... and using ancient scripture and ritual, we will remember.

We will remember being in bondage in Egypt. We will remember Moses and Pharaoh. We will remember the God who heard our cries, called us out of captivity, and delivered us from the hands of those who would own us.

We will remember the human cost involved in our liberation, even the cost to our captors. We will look for Elijah to take his place. We will taste the tears, taste the bitterness, and taste the hope.



After our Seder we those desiring will retire to the nave for a brief stripping of the altar.

## PREPARATION

There will be a sign-up sheet posted a couple weeks before in the narthex. There will also be recipe and ingredient cards with simple items you can bring. You might find it helpful to read the Passover story from the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Exodus. Other than that, you do not need to do anything other than bring your heart.

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<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Debbi drove to the coalfields of Floyd County, Kentucky, on the night of my ordination to the priesthood in 1988, in the full vestments of her office read the lesson from Isaiah 6 in Hebrew, and—exchanging a nod with Bp. Wimberly—participated in the laying on of hands. That probably could not happen today.