

The Christian Passover or Seder Meal

Passover is the oldest and most important religious festival in Judaism, commemorating God's deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. The focal point is a communal meal called the Seder – a time of rejoicing and celebration.

With increasing interest among Christians in this ancient festival there is

- increasing sensitivity to culture and a desire to learn about other cultures
- renewed awareness of the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures as a Christian scripture
- a desire or a need in our modern world to recover a sense of the sacred through liturgy and sacrament

Our Christian Seder Meal is presented as a way to express the Christian faith in the context of a gathered community by participating symbolically in the story of salvation. It is a Christian service, yet there has also been a deliberate attempt to preserve the spirit of the Jewish tradition and to respect the faith journey of Israelites and Jews across the centuries. For this reason the totally Christian dimension comes at the end of the service when we receive Holy Communion.

This service has long been a tradition for our churches and with the added participation of Castle Street for the last ten years it is now a real part of our Church at Castle participation in Holy Week.

During the symbolic first part of the service we use symbols as would be used in the Jewish Seder.

Matzot – today this is represented by flat cracker – like wafers. Dough made without yeast bakes into flat bread. Biblical tradition says that the Hebrews had to leave Egypt so quickly that they did not have time to let the bread rise, so they made the dough without yeast or leaven

Karpas – “green vegetable”. We usually use parsley. This is dipped in a small bowl of salt water, recalling the hyssop dipped for sprinkling on the door posts of Hebrew dwellings in preparation for the Exodus. (Exodus 12.22) The salty water recalls the tears shed by the Hebrews as they suffered in Egypt.

Haroseth – derived from the Hebrew word for clay. This is made from a mixture of honey, nuts and dates to sweeten the bitter herbs. Because of its appearance, it symbolizes the mud mixed with straw used by the slaves in the Egyptian buildings.

Beitzah – a “roasted egg” representing the burnt offerings brought to the Temple and it symbolizes the cycle of life, the endurance of God's people and the hope for a future.

Maror – “bitter herbs”. Traditionally this is horseradish. A reminder of the bitterness of life in bondage, not only in Egypt but everywhere.

Zeroah – the roasted shank bone of a lamb that is symbolic of the Passover lamb

During the ceremony there are four blessings of the wine and for this we offer either red wine or grape juice.

This part of the service ends and we eat a meal of roast lamb together. When the meal is over we clear and tidy the tables and our celebration of Holy Communion begins.

I hope that you will come along to this Church at Castle Seder Meal – tickets are available in each of the churches and you will find notice about this on the Sunday pew sheets/bulletins.

This year the Seder Meal is on Tuesday 22nd March 6.30 pm at St Augustines

Margaret