

# At the Table of our Lord:



A Community Meal for Holy Week

As your congregation prepares for Easter, plan a community meal—either a ceremonial/symbolic meal or a true festive feast—based on Passover.

In the words of Rabbi Solomon Bernards (*The Living Heritage of Passover*, B'nai B'rith, 1976)

For Christians, Passover is of special interest since it provides the historical background for the great Christian festival of Easter. The Last Supper is linked with the Passover seder, and such concepts as the Lamb of God and the wine and bread of communion originated in the Passover ritual.

As a child and adult, Jesus would have celebrated the Passover. On the night before he died, Jesus met with his disciples and together, they, once again, enjoyed the Passover meal together. At the Table of our Lord is a re-enactment of some of the elements of the Passover which Jesus celebrated. It includes rudiments of thousands of years of history when people celebrate freedom and recall the Exodus story. Passover is a creative festival combining food, family, storytelling, charity to strangers, games.

Passover was, and continues to be, family oriented.<sup>1</sup> There are lots of opportunities for children to participate. It is also experiential. It engages the senses—tasting, seeing, moving, hearing, smelling. This makes it a wonderful intergenerational event. Invite the whole congregation—children, youth, adults, seniors.

This service has an order of service, a haggadah, which has been modified to make it accessible for children.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although the Bible does not mention that women and children were present, I am quite sure they would have been. After all, who prepared the food?

<sup>2</sup> The word “haggadah” has several meanings—it is used to refer to the book containing the liturgy for the Seder service of Passover. It can also be used to describe parables, maxims or anecdotes that illustrate the meaning of Bible passages.

## Scriptural basis

In preparation for this meal, invite adults, older children and youth to read Exodus 5-12 and Luke 22: 7-20.

## Date for the meal

Plan *At the Table with our Lord* any time prior to Easter but, because, in 2007, Passover falls on April 3 and Maundy Thursday is on April 5, it may work best to host your communal meal on Wednesday, April 4.

## Preparation

- Print off the haggadah (order of service), p. 4, and provide one for each person.
- Recruit three readers—a man, a woman, a child. Recruit two or three servers. (These may be members of the group.)
- With your best church china and tablecloths, set a beautiful table. (Set the tables in a square.) Add flowers, candles, wine glasses. The room should look truly festive. (Reserve a special seat for the prophet, Elijah.)
- Prepare the ceremonial foods—chopped parsley, horseradish, haroset, lamb or beef bone with bits of meat clinging to the bone, hard boiled egg, salted water, matzoh. (See recipes for matzoh and haroset, on this page, or buy ready-made matzoh from a grocery store.) You will also need grape juice and/or red wine. Prepare a tray of the ceremonial food for every 8 or 10 participants. These are set on the tables prior to the meal and covered with a linen cloth.
- Provide small basins and towels and a pitcher (for the male reader) for the ceremonial washing of hands. You will need extra sets of these articles for every 8 to 10 participants.

## Biblical dress

Biblical dress adds historic authenticity to the meal. For each of the readers, provide a sash, robe, and/or head cover. Also, as people enter, provide a box of sashes or head ties and ask them to choose one item from a box to wear during the meal.

## Things you will need to decide

1. Do you want to do a real kitchen cleaning or a symbol kitchen cleaning prior to the meal? (See note 1, p. 5)
2. Do you want to offer only the ceremonial meal or also a feasting meal? A family Passover would include foods like roast lamb, chicken or turkey, spinach or other dark green vegetables, salad, rice seasoned with herbs, ratatouille (eggplant, zucchini, garlic & tomato), matzoh and haroset (for dessert).

## Recipes

### Haroset

Chop 2-3 apples, add ½ cup chopped nuts (walnuts, almonds or pistachio). Stir in 1 tsp. cinnamon, ¼ tsp. ginger or cloves, 1 tsp. to 1 tbsp. liquid honey, 1 tsp. grape juice. (This makes 8-10 tablespoons of haroset.)

### Matzoh

Combine 2 cups flour (1 cup whole wheat and 1 cup white OR 2 cups matzo meal) with 1½ cups water and ½ tsp. salt.

Knead the dough, roll and fold a few times. Cut dough into eight pieces and roll each piece as thinly as possible between two sheets of wax paper. Cut into rounds or squares and prick the surface with a fork. Cook on an ungreased cookie sheet for 3-4 minutes in a 475 degree oven. Turn over and bake until matzoh is lightly browned and crisp.

## Pronunciation Guide

Matzoh: MAHT-suh

Haroset: Khah-RAW-set

Afikomen: ah-fee-KOH-muh

# The Haggadah (Order of Service)

## 1. Preparing for the meal

Cleaning of the kitchen

## 2. Kitchen songs before the meal

## 3. Moving to the table

- a. Lighting the festival candles
- b. The cup of promises (Blessing of the Feast)
- c. Washing of hands
- d. The cup of remembering
- e. The four questions
- f. Haggadah (Telling the story)
- g. The blessing of the food
- h. The meal
- i. The afikomen
- j. The cup of the prophet Elijah
- k. Prayer of thanksgiving
- l. The cup of praise
- m. Blessing and closing song

# Notes on The Haggadah (Order of Service) and Reader's Script

## 1. Preparing for the meal: Cleaning of the kitchen

In Jewish households it is traditional to do a thorough cleaning of the kitchen so no traces of leavened bread remain in the house during the eight-day Passover holiday. As they gather, your group may do either a real cleaning of the church kitchen or a symbolic cleaning—wiping the refrigerator and counter tops.

## 2. Kitchen songs before the meal

When you have finished the kitchen cleaning, sing some Jewish folk songs like *Hava Nagila* or choose Psalms from *The Book of Praise*. Numbers 68, 72, 74 or 78 are easy for children to learn.

## 3. Moving to the table

Distribute and briefly explain the Haggadah (order of service). Invite people to move to the room where you have prepared the festive table. Leave an empty place for the prophet Elijah. When all are seated, proceed with lighting the candles.

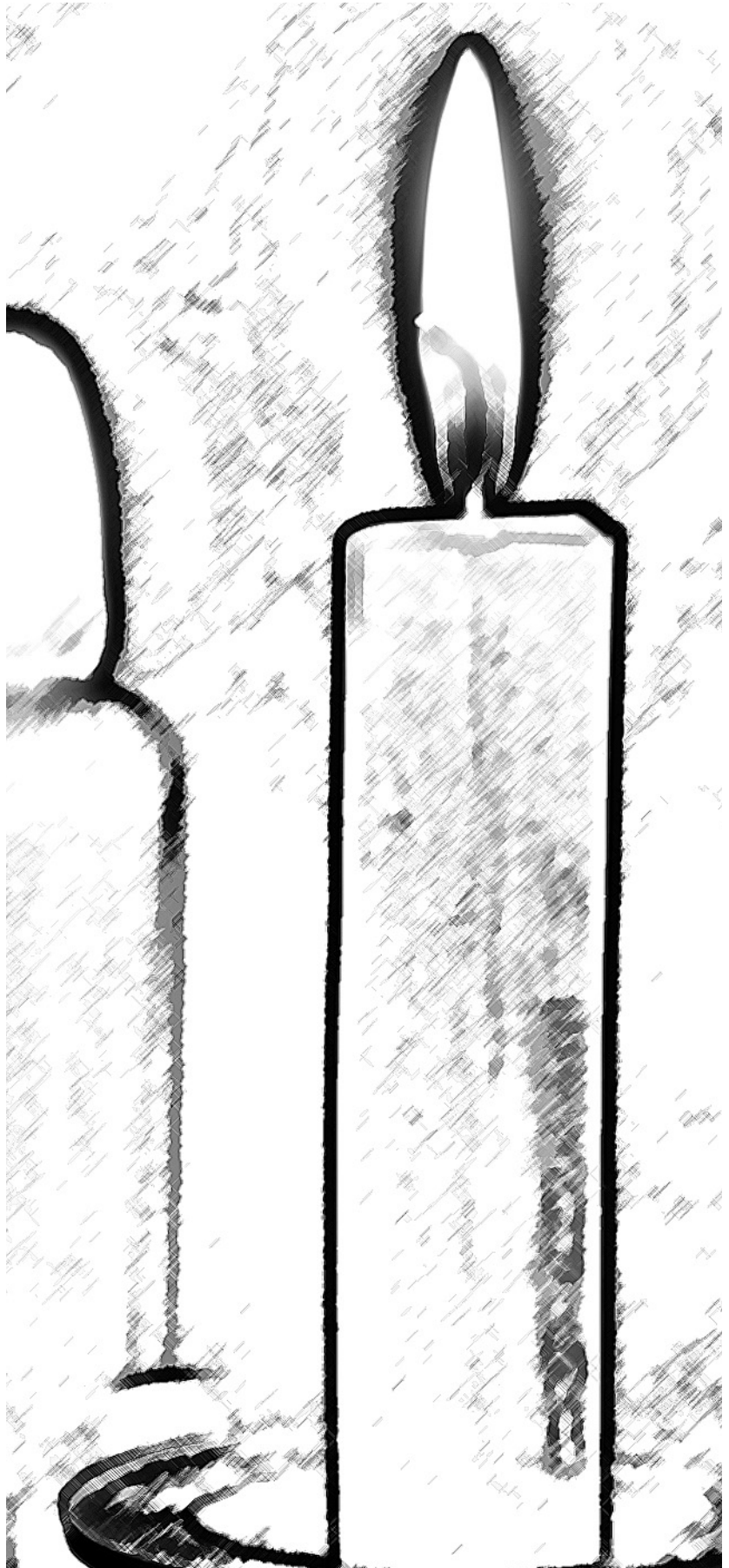
### 3. a. Lighting the festival candles

Male reader:

The story of how God led the Israelites to freedom has been told over and over for thousands of years. Today we retell the story as a way of remembering that God is with us.

Female reader:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who chooses each of us and makes us in your image. We light these celebration candles in your name. *(The woman lights all the candles on the table, leaving four unlit in front of her.)*



### 3. b. The cup of promises (Blessing of the Feast)

Male reader:

God told Moses, "See what I will do." And God makes four promises:

–I will bring you out of Egypt.

–I will free you from slavery.

–I will save you by my own hand.

–I will take you to be my own people, and I will be your God. *(As each promise is read, the female reader lights the four candles in front of her.)*

To remember these four promises, we drink from our cups four times in this meal.  
*(Man raises cup.)*

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who gives us promises. I invite you *(speaking to participants)* to raise your cup and say "Blessed are you, O Lord our God," *(All drink together.)*

### 3. c. Washing of hands

Male reader:

The psalmist says that we must have clean hands and a pure heart.<sup>3</sup> *(The male leader ceremonially pours water from a pitcher into a basin, washes his hands and wipes them with a small towel and prays aloud:*

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who asks us to have clean hands and a pure heart.

*(The male leader walks around the table, pouring water into each of the basins and asks people to pass the basin to their right. When all have finished, ask the servers to remove the water basins.)<sup>4</sup>*

### 3. d. The cup of remembering

Female reader:

Once we were slaves, but God made us promises. God brought us out of Egypt. God freed us from slavery. We were saved by God's hand. We are God's people, and God is our God.

We will drink from the cup of remembering. Please raise your glass. We will say the words "Blessed are you, O Lord our God" before we drink.

### 3. e. The four questions

Child:

Why is this night different from all other nights?

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<sup>3</sup>Psalm 24:3-4

<sup>4</sup>If you have a small group, you may choose to wash the hands of the person to your right.

Male reader:

It is a duty and privilege to tell our children and our children's children the great stories of what God has done for us.

Child:

On all other nights we eat bread made with leaven or yeast. On this night, why do we eat only unleavened, flat bread?

Female reader:

When the Israelites left Egypt, they were in such a hurry that they didn't have time to let their dough rise. Instead, they baked it flat. This flat bread reminds us of that day. (*The woman holds up the flatbread.*) We eat the matzoh, the flat bread, to remember.

Child:

On all other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables. On this night, why do we eat only bitter herbs?

Male reader:

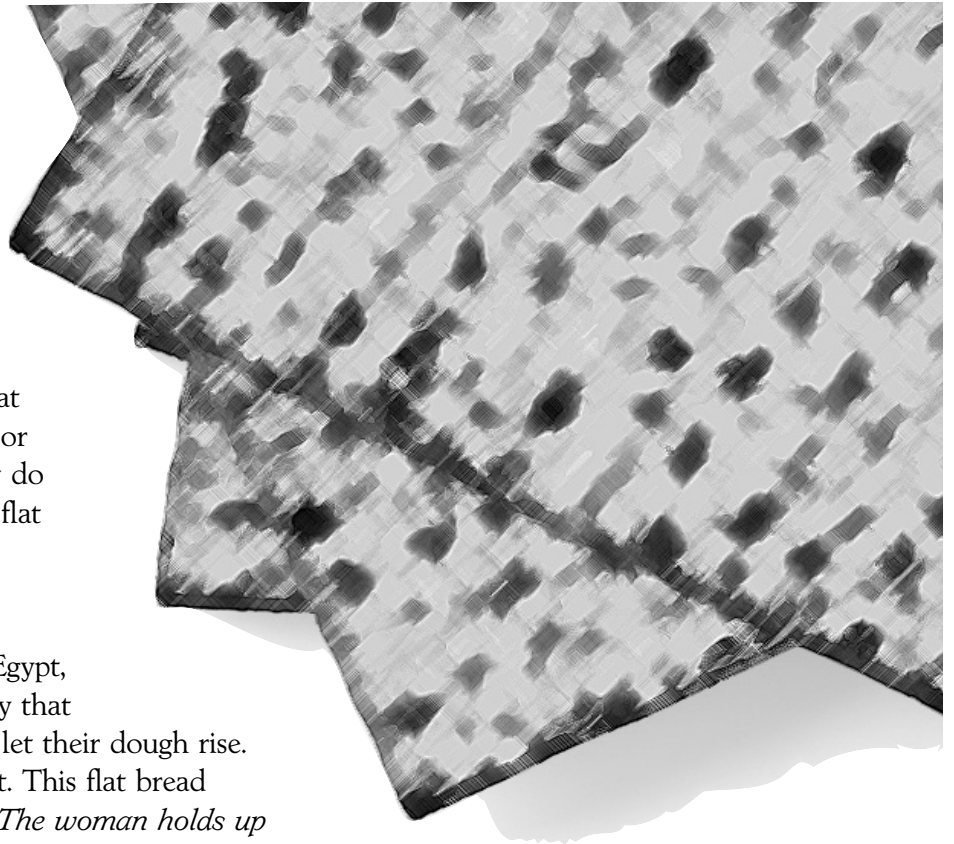
We eat the bitter herbs to remind us that life was bitter for the Israelites in Egypt. They were slaves and their lives were bitter with hard, back-breaking work as they slaved to make bricks and mortar. They worked hard in the fields and were often beaten. Today, there are people who still have to endure bitter lives. We eat the bitter herbs to remember. (*The man holds up the horseradish.*)

Child:

On all other nights we do not dip our vegetables in anything. On this night, why do we dip them twice?

Female reader:

First, we dip our vegetables into the salt water to remind us of the tears of the slaves. Then, we dip our matzoh into the haroset which is sweet. We dip the bitter into the sweet to remember that even the most bitter things in life can be sweetened by our hope in God. (*The female reader demonstrates dipping the parsley into the salt water, then puts the parsley on a piece of matzoh and, with a spoon, adds a little haroset on top.*)



### 3. f. Haggadah (Telling the story)

Storyteller:<sup>5</sup>

Here is the story of how God led the Israelite people out of slavery. (*The storyteller opens the Bible to Exodus, but the following synopsis of the story is inside and he/she reads from it.*)

The Hebrew people had been in Egypt for a long, long time. Their life was very hard and bitter and, every day, it got harder. The ruler of Egypt, Pharaoh, was jealous that the Hebrews were growing so quickly, and he tried to make them work harder and harder.

The Hebrews hated being slaves. They longed to worship God in their own way. They longed to have time to rest and enjoy the festivals their ancestors had taught them. They longed to be free.

They asked Moses and Aaron to speak to Pharaoh. "God wants you to let our people go," the two brothers told Pharaoh.

But Pharaoh was angry. "Make those Israelites work harder!" he shouted. And so the Hebrews had to make more bricks out of clay and straw. Pharaoh made their work even harder by forcing the Israelites to go out to the fields to find the straw for the bricks.

Many bad things began to happen. The river turned red like blood. Clouds of bugs and flies came. Frogs and grasshoppers crawled all over the land. Cows and sheep got sick. Hail rained out of the sky. God was trying to convince Pharaoh to let the people go.

Then a terrible sickness came to many of the households, but none of the Hebrew children died. Finally, Pharaoh had had enough. "Get out!" he shouted. "Take what you need...but just go!"

The Israelites left quickly. They didn't even have time to let the bread rise. They just gathered up their clothes, a bit of food, some flasks of water and they fled...away, away from slavery.

For many years they followed their leader, Moses, until they came to the land that God had promised them. (*Reader sets down Bible, then continues reading the following paragraph from the script.*)

Each year the Jews have a special meal called Passover. They remember how the terrible sickness passed over their houses and how God led them to freedom. Each year, when Jesus was a boy, he celebrated Passover with his family and friends and remembered God's goodness.

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<sup>5</sup>This may be the male or female reader or may be an additional person



### 3. g. The blessing of the food

Male reader:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who gives us good food.  
Bless this meal and may it be used to strengthen our bodies so we are better able to serve you. Amen.

### 3. h. The meal

Female reader:

The matzoh, the flat bread, (woman raises bread) reminds us that God's people did not have time to let their bread rise. Please take a piece of matzoh for your meal.  
*(Woman passes the plate to her right.)*

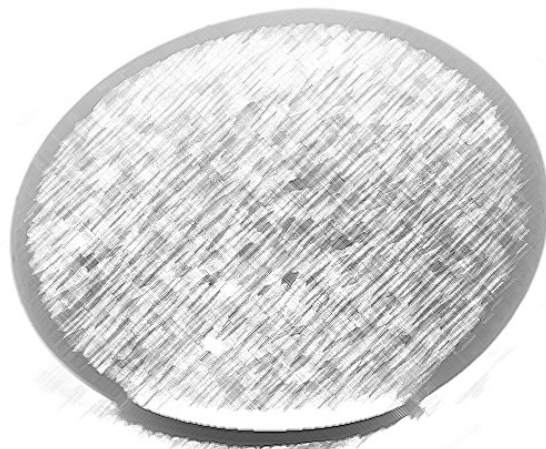
The bitter herbs remind us of the bitterness of slavery. Use a piece of your matzoh to taste the bitter herbs. *(The woman breaks off a piece of matzoh and dips it in the horseradish.)*

Dip your vegetables into the salt water to remember the tears of God's people.  
*(The woman dips parsley into the salt water, eats it and waits until everyone has had a taste.)*

The haroset reminds us of the bricks that the Israelite slaves had to make. But the haroset is sweet because it reminds us that God can turn bitterness into sweetness. Add some haroset to your matzoh and enjoy the sweetness of God. *(All try the haroset on a piece of matzoh.)*

The lamb reminds us of the blood that was put on the doors to protect the Israelite people when others around them were dying. In the book of Exodus there are instructions for how to celebrate the Passover meal. It says, "On that night, the people are to eat meat, along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. Have a taste of meat and remember. *(Give people time to tear off a small piece of meat.)*

Before it is peeled, the egg has a hard shell *(reader taps a hard boiled egg against the table)* which reminds us of the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. But the egg is also a sign of new birth and eternal life. The shape of the egg shows no beginning and no end. Enjoy the egg.  
*(All take a piece of hard-boiled egg.)*



### 3. i. The afikomen

Female reader:

This is a time for the children to have a little fun. Jewish children have been playing this game for thousands of years. The afikomen is a hidden matzoh. Look around the room and see if you can find it. There is a special prize for someone who finds the afikomen. *(Allow time for the children to search. When it has been found, give the child a wrapped prize but invite the other children to search under their plate for a small surprise—a package of stickers, a red heart or a temporary tattoo.)*

### 3. j. The cup of the prophet Elijah

Male reader:

Let us raise the third cup of remembering. This is the cup of Elijah the prophet. *(The man moves to stand behind the empty chair for the prophet Elijah and pours wine into Elijah's cup.)* Elijah was a mighty prophet who taught us about God. Many Israelites believed that Elijah would come at Passover to announce the coming of the Messiah. Jesus compared his cousin, John the Baptist, to Elijah. He said, "John the Baptist is the Elijah who was to come." <sup>6</sup>

We drink from the cup remembering the prophet Elijah. *(Leader raises his glass and says, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God." All are invited to drink repeating the words, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God.")*

### 3.k. Prayer of thanksgiving

Female reader:

Please join me in a prayer:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who feeds the world with goodness. We thank you for your loving kindness and your pity. Your loving kindness lasts forever.

We thank you for this group of faithful people who have gathered to sit at table with Jesus. In this holy week, we thank you for the things that free us.

Help us to share this good news with others. Amen.

### 3. l. The cup of praise

Male reader:

We raise our fourth glass of remembering. Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who created the fruit of the vine. *(All are invited to drink repeating the words "Blessed are you, O Lord our God")*

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<sup>6</sup>Matthew 11:14

### 3. m. Blessing and closing song

Leader: *(holding out hands toward people)*

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord be kind and gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favour and give you peace. Amen. <sup>7</sup>

For the closing song, choose from one of the following hymns from *The Book of Praise*—“Shalom chaverim” (#731) or verses 2 & 3 of “Be Still and know that I am God” (#64).

It is also possible to add communion to this service. Use the quote from Rabbi Bernards, p. 2, to provide a link to communion.



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<sup>7</sup>Numbers 6:24-26