

# The Church: Special Ceremonies and Services



## SABBATH—NOVEMBER 24

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Matthew 28:19, 20; Romans 6:3–8; John 13:1–17; Matthew 26:26–28; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Peter replied [answered], ‘All of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then your sins will be forgiven. You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ ” (Acts 2:38, NIV).

**KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT:** God has given us certain services and rites<sup>1</sup> that help to make our faith stronger.

**MANY SOCIETIES HAVE SPECIAL SERVICES, SOMETIMES CALLED “RITES OF PASSAGE.”** In some cultures, rites of passage are held to help persons to move from one stage of life into another. For example, rites of adulthood are done around puberty.<sup>2</sup> These rites are different from place to place. But all have the goal of making sure that younger members are influenced to become responsible citizens. In the process, boys or girls are taught the ways of adulthood. They are shown what adults expect of them as adult members of society.

In the Christian community there also are special services or acts. These holy acts make a person's fellowship in the community official. These acts also help to prepare members to become faithful and useful members of that community. And they are the way of helping members understand their responsibility to Christ. This week we will look at three rites that teach our faith: baptism, foot-washing, and the Lord's Supper.

1. rites—special services held on a regular basis.

2. puberty—the period during which a child matures into manhood or womanhood.

**SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 25****NAMING THE HOLY RITES****(Matthew 28:19, 20)**

During the early history of the Christian church, the language spoken by believers in the West was Greek. They used the Greek word *mysterion*, or “mystery,” to describe Christian holy rites. In the eastern part of the church, Latin was the main language. There, the word used to describe Christian holy rites was *sacramentum*, or “sacrament.” A *sacramentum* was an oath that a Roman soldier swore. By taking it, he was declaring his obedience to the commander’s order. Those who used this word felt that it described most correctly the meaning of the holy rites. But, with time, the idea came to mean an act of unseen power that took place inside a person. The church of the Middle Ages named seven such acts “sacraments.” People believed that these holy acts helped to bring grace<sup>3</sup> into a person’s soul.

During the Reformation,<sup>4</sup> the sacraments came under criticism. In the minds of many people, the word *sacrament* appeared stained and spoiled. So a different word was needed. That new word was *ordinance*. The word *ordinance* comes from the verb “to ordain.” This word makes an ordinance a special act that Christ Himself started or blessed. To

choose the word *ordinance* over *sacrament* means that we take part in the acts because they are God’s chosen means (method) for us to show our obedience and loyalty to Jesus as Lord. Seventh-day Adventists consider baptism, footwashing, and the Lord’s Supper as ordinances. They are the acts that show our loyalty to Christ. They are ways of showing our faith.

**Read Matthew 28:19, 20; John 13:14; and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. How much do these verses support the idea that the holy acts should be described as “ordinances”?**

We know that ordinances are important. But we must always remember that these are not acts by which we earn salvation by good works. Sin is too serious for rituals, even if they are started by Christ Himself. They themselves cannot save us. Only the death of Jesus on the cross was enough to “pay for” the salvation of people as deeply sinful as we are. The ordinances are just symbols showing that we appreciate what Christ has done for us and showing our union (oneness) with Him. For this reason, the ordinances serve their purpose well. They are a means (method) to an end (goal). In other words, the ordinances help us to look up to Christ as our Creator and Savior.

3. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He gives us to take away our sins.

4. Reformation—a religious movement started by Martin Luther in the 1500s that rebelled against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.



The ordinances of baptism, footwashing, and the Lord's Supper help us to look up to Christ as our Creator and Savior.

## MONDAY—NOVEMBER 26

### BAPTISM (Romans 6:3–8)

The New Testament uses several images (pictures) to describe what baptism means. First, baptism symbolizes (shows) a spiritual union (oneness) with Christ (Romans 6:3–8). Baptism means taking part in His suffering, death, and resurrection (return to life), as well as turning away from one's past lifestyle. In this way, baptism is connected with (1) repentance (turning away from sin) and the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38), (2) the new birth and receiving of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13), and (3) joining the church (Acts 2:41, 47).

Baptism symbolizes a promise and a spiritual relationship with God through Christ (Colossians 2:11, 12). Baptism means what circumcision<sup>5</sup> meant in the Old Testament. Baptism also symbolizes a transfer (change)

of loyalties. This puts a person into a community that is dedicated to the service of Christ. The receiving of the Spirit in baptism helps believers to serve the church and work for the salvation of those who are not yet of the faith (Acts 1:5, 8).

Several years ago the Joint Committee of the Church of England on Baptism, Confirmation,<sup>6</sup> and Holy Communion<sup>7</sup> made a surprising confession. It said that “the receivers of baptism were normally adults and not infants [babies]. It must be admitted that there is no proof in the New Testament for the Baptism of infants.”—Adapted from *Baptism and Confirmation Today* (London: SCM, 1955), page 34, quoted by Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988), page 1102. This means that the true teaching of baptism does not encourage baptizing infants because true baptism requires faith and repentance (feeling sorry for sin) from the people who wish to be baptized. Also, the Bible shows in Romans 10:17 that repentance must be joined with Bible study. These actions are necessary for people who want to be baptized in order for them to show “fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8, NKJV) as proof of their relationship with Christ.

Baptism helps us to understand the difference between an ordinance and a sacrament. Those who think of baptism as a sacrament believe that baptism itself gives a person the promise

5. circumcision—a Jewish ceremony that requires the removal of the foreskin from the male's penis as a symbol of his relationship with God.

6. Confirmation—a ceremony in which someone becomes a full, adult member of a religion.

7. Communion—a ceremony which helps Christians remember Jesus' last supper and His death on the cross.

of eternal life instead of death. In this understanding, the age of the person does not matter, because it is all a spiritual event anyway. But baptism as an ordinance shows that the baptism is only a symbol of a deeper truth. It shows that a person has already changed his or her life by experiencing Jesus. In this view, candidates for baptism should have already experienced faith in Christ. So, the question of who is baptized, and when, becomes very important.

**If you have been baptized, think back upon the experience. If you understand what it means, then why do we need to be “baptized” every day? How can this be done?**



Baptism symbolizes a relationship with Christ.

## TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 27

### THE ORDINANCE OF HUMILITY (Luke 22:24–27)

It is hard to imagine the pain that must have been in the heart of Jesus. He knew He had to face the Cross. But He saw His own disciples being

jealous and fighting over who would be the greatest in His kingdom.

**Read Luke 22:24–27. (Read also Matthew 18:1 and Matthew 20:21.) What important truth had the disciples still not learned?**

Our world is so twisted and changed by sin that everything is upside down. Who in his or her right mind would rather be the one serving than the one served? Is not the whole point of life to get ahead, to be rich, and to be famous, rather than being a servant? With this attitude (thought or feeling) in mind, it is no surprise that at the Last Supper Jesus washed the disciples' feet. No words could have shown greater truth about what true greatness is than Jesus' act of washing the feet of those who should have kissed His feet instead.

**What does John 13:1–17 teach us about footwashing as a part of the Last Supper service?**

So much amazing truth rings out through these verses. In verse 3, it says that Jesus knew that the Father had given “all things into His hands” (NKJV). What happened next? Yes, Jesus knew very well that “He had come from God and was going to God” (NKJV). But He rose from the meal and started washing the disciples' feet (verse 5). Even without fully knowing who Jesus really was, the disciples must have been shocked. How could they have failed to see the lesson there?

Think some more about what the foot-washing service truly means to us today. Before we claim for ourselves all that Christ has done for us, how important it is for us to come to the Lord's Supper feeling very humble and in need of God's grace.

**Whose feet might it do you some spiritual good to wash?**



No words could have shown greater truth about what true greatness is than Jesus' act of washing the feet of those who should have kissed His instead.

**WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 28**

### THE LORD'S SUPPER (Matthew 26:26–28)

**Read Matthew 26:26–28. What meaning is clear in what Jesus is telling us to do here? Why is it important to see the bread and the cup as symbols?**

The Lord's Supper takes the place

of the Passover festival of the old-covenant (Jewish) era. The Passover met its fulfillment when Christ, the Passover Lamb, gave His life. Before His death, Christ Himself made the change. He changed it to the great festival of the New Testament church under the new covenant. The Passover festival honors Israel's freedom from slavery in Egypt. In the same way, the Lord's Supper honors the freedom from spiritual Egypt, which means the slavery of sin.



Christ, the Passover Lamb, gave His life for us.

The Passover lamb's blood was put on the lintel<sup>8</sup> and doorposts of homes in Egypt to protect the people from death. And the food gave them the strength to escape from Egypt (Exodus 12:3–8). So Christ's sacrifice brings freedom from death. A believer is saved when he or she eats His body and drinks His blood (John 6:54). The Lord's Supper preaches that Christ's death on the cross gives

8. lintel—the beam that supports the door at the top.

us our salvation, forgives our sins, and promises us victory over sin.

**Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. What important doctrinal (Bible) truth about the Cross is shown here?**

Here we see, clearly, the important part of Christ's death as man's Substitute. His body was broken, and His blood flowed for us. At the cross Jesus accepted what really belonged to us. Each time we take part in the Lord's Supper, we should always remember what Christ did for us.

When you take part in the Lord's Supper, you need to remember the foot-washing part too. The foot-washing part helps to prepare our hearts before we take part in the Communion service. This should help us to get a sense of the connection with God and fellow believers. With the Cross so clearly in our minds while we take part in the bread and unfermented wine (grape juice), we are reminded that we are all sinners in constant need of grace. The Communion service should help us all to understand our responsibilities, not just to the Lord but to one another too.

### THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 29

#### LOOKING FORWARD TO THE SECOND COMING (1 Corinthians 11:26)

**What great hope is given in 1 Corinthians 11:26?**

With these words we see how closely

connected the Second Coming and the Lord's Supper service are. That makes so much sense because the Second Coming is, really, the greatest goal of what happened at the Cross. One could argue that the biggest reason for the First Coming was the Second Coming. The First Coming opened the way for the Second.

**What good would the first coming of Christ be without the Second?**

In a way, the Lord's Supper service acts as a bridge between the Cross and the Second Coming. Each time we take part in the Lord's Supper, we think about the Cross and what it did for us. But what it did for us cannot be separated from the Second Coming. In fact, what Jesus did on the cross for us does not reach its greatest goal until the Second Coming.

**Read Matthew 26:29. What is Jesus saying in this one verse?**

Look at the promise and the hope that the Lord gives us here. These words suggest a closeness and love between the saved and the Savior that will last throughout eternity. Jesus is promising us that He "will not drink of this fruit of the vine" (NKJV) until He drinks it new with us in the eternal kingdom. Remember who He is—the Creator of the universe (Colossians 1:16)! This should make His promise even more wonderful. So, the Lord's Supper means so much. But, more important, it should also remind us of the great

hope that awaits us at the Second Coming of Jesus.

**Discouraged? Depressed? Welcome to a sinful world. Why, then, is it so important to look at the Cross, and think about what it means for you now, as well as what it means for your future in eternity?**

### FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 30

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read chapters 15–18 in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005).

“Baptism is a most holy and important ordinance. So there should be a full understanding of its meaning. It means repentance for sin and a new life in Christ Jesus. There should be no great hurry to receive the ordinance without first understanding how holy it is. Let both parents and children understand the cost that Jesus paid.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 6, page 93.

“The Passover pointed backward to the freedom of the children of Israel. And it also pointed forward to Christ, the Lamb of God, killed to save fallen [sinful] man. The blood sprinkled upon the doorposts symbolized [stood for] the cleansing blood of Christ. It also showed that sinful humans continued to depend upon that blood for safety from the power of Satan, and for final salvation.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 1, page 201.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① When was the last time that you washed someone’s feet in the foot-washing service? Why is this such an important practice?

② Read 1 Peter 3:20, 21. What comparison does Peter use to help to explain the meaning of baptism?

③ Early Christians were blamed for many things of which they were not guilty. For example, they were blamed for eating the bodies of other people. One of the reasons was the following verses: “Jesus said to them, ‘What I’m [I am] about to tell you is true. You must eat the Son of Man’s body and drink his blood. If you don’t [do not], you have no life in you. Anyone who eats my body and drinks my blood has eternal life. I will raise him up on the last day. My body is real food. My blood is real drink. Anyone who eats my body and drinks my blood remains in me. And I remain in him’ ” (John 6:53–56, NIV). What is Jesus teaching us with these words? Why is it so important that we understand the spiritual meaning of verses such as these?

④ In class, discuss in more detail the Lord’s Supper as an opportunity to fellowship with Jesus and all believers. How can it help your church to better understand what our responsibilities are to one another and to the outside community as a whole?