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1. Eastern Catholicism

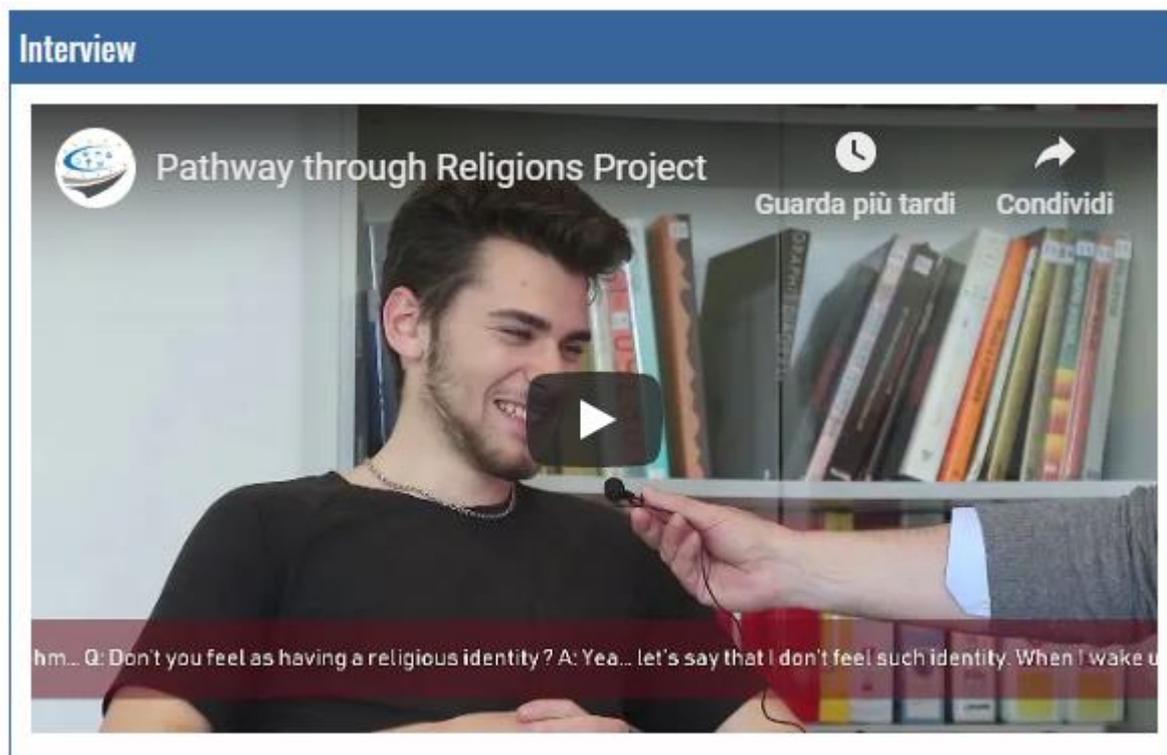
1.1 Introduction

The liturgical rites of the Eastern Catholic Churches follow the Gregorian calendar, adopted by the Catholic Church in 1582, but they have kept the form of the ceremonies celebrated in the undivided Church, before the Great Schism of 1054, so they are often the same as those celebrated by the faithful of the Orthodox churches, even if these follow - at least in part - the Julian calendar.

The most important liturgical rite is the Divine Liturgy; the Byzantine tradition recognizes three forms of Divine Liturgy: that of St. John Chrysostom, that of St. Basil and the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified.

- The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is commonly celebrated every day of the year.
- The liturgy of St. Basil is celebrated at Christmas, at Epiphany, on every Sunday of Lent, on Holy Thursday, on Easter Eve and on the day of St. Basil.
- The liturgy of the Pre-sanctified is celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays of each week of Lent, without consecration, since the bread is consecrated on the previous Sunday.

Other important ceremonies are the liturgy of the hours, the processions and the blessings, which are always linked to the memory of Christ, of the Virgin Mary and of the saints, according to the dates of the liturgical calendar.

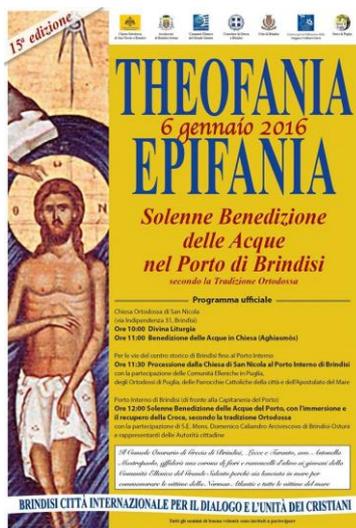


1.2 Great blessing of the waters

This ceremony (common to the Orthodox Churches and to the Eastern Catholic Churches) takes place on 6th January, the day of the celebration of the Holy Theophanies (= Revelation of God) of the Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, after the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy or after the vespers. A procession is formed to go to the fountain outside the church, or on a river or the sea, or at the back of the church where a support is prepared with a large container full of water for blessing. During the procession some hymns are sung, then the deacon recites a prayer aloud, and the priest recites some other prayers in a low voice; when the deacon has finished, the priest recites a prayer aloud, and then plunges the cross into the water three times, holding it with his hands together with the bunch of aromatic herbs, while singing a hymn three times, followed by the chorus. All the people present at the ceremony then go and kiss the Holy Cross held by the ministrant, while the last sprinkles the holy water on the head of each of them with a branch. Finally, a concluding hymn is sung.



Picture of the rite at Fanar, Istanbul, Turkey



Sacred advice in Brindisi, Italy

The symbols present in this rite are basically three: the cross, the water and the aromatic herbs. The cross indicates the divinity of Christ, who sanctified the waters of the Jordan on the day of his baptism; water represents the purification of the faithful, which is why they are sprinkled by the celebrant; the aromatic herbs recall those that according to tradition appeared on the site of the crucifixion.

The religious value of the rite is essentially propitiatory, because it is placed at the beginning of the year, and according to the Greek tradition on this day "the heavens are open" to welcome the holy desires of the faithful.

The participation of the faithful is very large, partly because some must carry liturgical objects in the procession (icons, candles, incense), and the male faithful must recover the cross when it is thrown into the rivers or at sea.

The space of the celebration is external, even if sometimes the blessing takes place entirely inside the church; the ritual is also a challenge, because in Eastern Europe at the beginning of January the climate is often freezing, and the waters are frozen.

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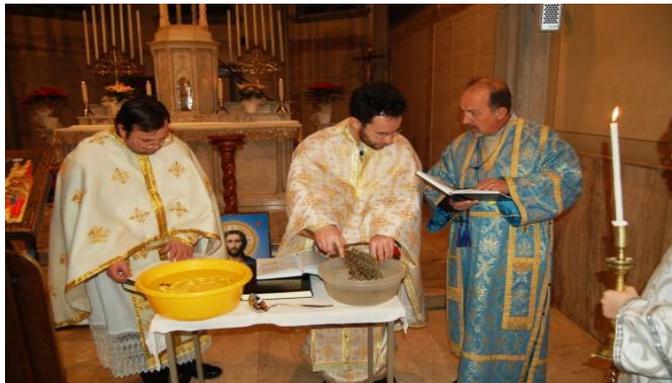
Pictures



Pictures of the rite in Lecco, Italy



Pictures of the rite in Lecco, Italy



Pictures of the rite in Padua, Italy

Videos



*Rite of the blessing in S. Maria in Cosmedin,
Rome, Italy*



Rite of the Ukraine catholic church in Florence



Rite of the Orthodox Church in Florence



Rite in Budapest



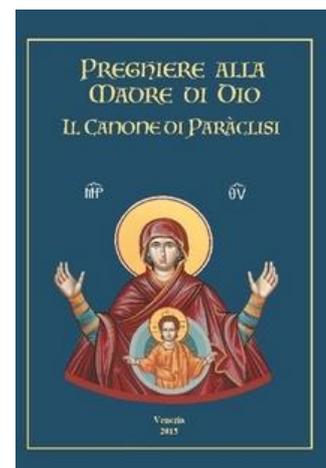
Rite of the orthodox church in Palermo

1.3 πάντα κλίσε (long and ancient prayer of Christianity) of the Dormition

The Byzantine devotion to the Mother of God (*Theotòkos*) widely expresses itself in the liturgical worship, and particularly in some compositions.

One of these, the paracletic Canon (= *plead to the Mother of God*), composed around the 9th century, is a devotional text extensively widespread in Eastern Christianity, and represents the essential part of the πάντα κλίσε, the liturgy office in honour of the Mother of God, used in times of difficulty or great affliction, and usually sung during the Lent of the Dormition, that is every day in the two weeks before the great festivity of the Dormition of the Saint and Holy Mary. The structure and organization of the celebration is quite complex, and varies according to places and circumstances, but at the centre of the liturgy there is still the Paracletic Canon, composed of nine odes interspersed with prayers.

At the end of the Paraclisi, on the evening of 14th August, a particular icon, which is made of an embroidered cloth called "epitaphios" (= *epithaph*), representing the sleeping Virgin, is placed in a coffin to symbolize the Virgin's shroud and carried in procession.



Cover of an Italian edition of the Paracletic canon

Pictures



An Eastern Catholic priest and a Latin priest opening the procession of the Dormition at Montebello Ionico (CS)



Epitaph at the Greek Papal Seminary



Contemporary epitaph (21st century)



Orthodox Epitaph (19th century)

Video



Procession of the Dormition at Macchia Albanese (CS)

The Feast day of Saint Peter and Paul is one of the twelve most important festivities of the liturgical calendar of the Eastern Churches, so as to have a specific organization. At the end of the liturgy and of the vespers the icon of the two Saints, which in some communities is carried in procession, is presented to the veneration of the faithful.

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The Feast day and the commemoration of the Apostles Peter and Paul is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom which is conducted on the morning of the feast day and preceded by a Morning (*Orthros*) service. A Great Vespers is conducted on the evening before the day of the Feast.



Eastern icons of the Saint Apostles Peter and Paul

Eastern Churches have a beautiful presentation and recognize the importance and prominence of the Apostles Peter and Paul with the icon showing both Apostles standing together holding an image of the Church.

Both Apostles, being chosen by our Lord, were instrumental in the establishment and growth of the early Church through their boldness, spiritual strength, and wisdom. Thus, they are recognized as "pillars" of the Church, having offered all even unto death for the sake of the Gospel of Christ.



Procession of the SS Apostles Peter and Paul (Latin church)



Beginning of the Byzantine celebration of Saint Peter and Paul

In the icon, the Apostle Paul, the great missionary of the early Church, is holding a Gospel book, while the Apostle Peter offers a blessing with his right hand. At the top of the icon is a semicircle, representing the divine realm. Rays extend in the semicircle representing the blessings and presence of God upon His two chosen heralds of True Faith.

2. Judaism

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter you can find information about Jewish ceremonies – the chapter presents information about Shavuot, Sukkot and Rosh Hashana. Ceremonies are important part of each culture. If Rosh Hashana is quite popular, because you can find similar celebrations along many religions and cultures, Shavuot and Sukkot are not so popular but are two of the most important holidays during the year and related to very specific ceremonies, related to traditions kept with centuries.



2.2. Shavuot

Of all the Jewish festivals in the calendar, Shavuot is not the best-known. But it's one of their three major yearly celebrations, and it takes place over one to two days in early summer, falling on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan. The festival marks the announcement of the 10 commandments of the Torah, and in English it's referred to as the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot itself meaning 'weeks').

Shavuot has a double significance. It marks the all-important wheat harvest in Israel (Exodus 34:22), and it commemorates the anniversary of the day when God gave the Torah to the nation of Israel assembled at Mount Sinai—although the association is not explicit in the Biblical text between the giving of the Torah (Matan Torah) and Shavuot.

The holiday is one of the Shalosh Regalim, the three Biblical pilgrimage festivals. The word Shavuot means weeks, and it marks the conclusion of the Counting of the Omer. Its date is directly linked to that of Passover; the Torah mandates the seven-week Counting of the Omer, beginning on the second day of Passover, to be immediately followed by Shavuot. This counting of days and weeks is understood to express anticipation and desire for the giving of the Torah. On Passover, the people of Israel were freed from their enslavement to Pharaoh; on Shavuot, they were given the Torah and became a nation committed to serving God. The *yahrzeit* of King David is traditionally observed on Shavuot. Hasidic Jews also observe the *yahrzeit* of the Baal Shem Tov.

Shavuot is one of the less familiar Jewish holidays to secular Jews in the Jewish diaspora, while those



A jubilant Shavuot celebration using props to symbolise the beginning of the Land of Israel's wheat harvest

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in Israel and the Orthodox community are more aware of it. According to Jewish law, Shavuot is celebrated in Israel for one day and in the Diaspora for two days. Reform Judaism celebrates only one day, even in the Diaspora.

In the Bible, Shavuot is called the Festival of Weeks (Hag ha-Shavuot, Exodus 34:22, Deuteronomy 16:10); Festival of Reaping

(Hag ha-Katsir, Exodus 23:16), and Day of the First Fruits (Yom ha-Bikkurim, Numbers 28:26).

The Talmud refers to Shavuot as Atzeret (literally, "refraining" or "holding back"), referring to the prohibition against work on this holiday and to the conclusion of the holiday and season of Passover. Since Shavuot occurs 50 days after Passover, Hellenistic Jews gave it the name "Pentecost" ("fiftieth day").

The festival commemorates the anniversary of the day God gave the Torah to the entire nation of Israel assembled at Mount Sinai, and it marks the start of the wheat harvest in the Land of Israel too. The day is typically marked by the consumption of dairy products and fish, because before God gave his commandments his devotees were unsure of what kind of meat they would be permitted to eat. Among the dairy dishes consumed are cheesecake, cheese blintzes, cheese kreplach and cheese sambousek.

Greenery and flowers are often used to decorate homes during Shavuot because Mount Sinai was thought to have burst into bloom in anticipation of God's words. On top of this, there is also all-night Torah study, plus readings from the Book of Ruth and a liturgical poem called Akdamut in synagogue.



Flowers and greenery are key to the event's symbolism (Shavuot)

Pictures



Shavuot celebrations in Nablus in the West Bank, Palestine



Shavuot, Kibbutz Gan-Shmuel, Israel



Ethiopian Israeli girls dressed in traditional white dresses hold a basket of fruits and vegetables as they stand in a field, ahead of the upcoming Jewish holiday of Shavuot

Videos



The Shavuot Ceremony in Moshav Bilu, Israel on 20140604



Shavuot First-Fruits/Twin Loaves Reenactment

2.3. Sukkot

Sukkot (Feast of Booths or Tabernacles) is one of the three biblically based pilgrimage holidays known as the shalosh regalim. It is an agricultural festival that originally was considered a thanksgiving for the fruit harvest. Sukkot are hut-like structures that the Jews lived in during the 40 years of travel through the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. As a temporary dwelling, the sukkah also represents the fact that all existence is fragile, and therefore Sukkot is a time to appreciate the shelter of our homes and our bodies.

Sukkot is celebrated by, first of all, building a sukkah. Jews are required to eat in the sukkah for eight days (seven days in Israel), and some even sleep in the sukkah for the duration of the holiday. The sukkah is decorated and the first day is considered a holy day in which most forms of work are forbidden. The rabbis dictated that arbat ha'minim (four species) should be held together and waved during the holiday. These are based on four plants mentioned in the Bible, and the rabbinic version includes the following: etrog (fruit of the citron tree), lulav (palm frond), hadas (leaves from the myrtle tree), and aravah (leaves from the willow tree). This waving



Moroccan Jews and Israeli Jewish tourists participate in a religious ceremony to observe the holiday of Sukkot

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ceremony was performed at the Temple in the ancient world.

On the Hebrew calendar, Sukkot starts on the 15th of Tishrei and continues until the 21st of Tishrei. The seventh day of Sukkot is called **Hoshanah Rabah**. On that day in the synagogue Jews circle the room seven times while the arbat ha'minim are held and special prayers are recited.

There are no traditional Sukkot foods, except for **kreplach** (stuffed dumplings). Sukkot meal inspiration can come from the harvest origin of the holiday, and meals can include fresh fruits and vegetables, or other harvest-related ingredients. Of course, challah, chicken soup, and kugels are traditional Jewish foods that can be served on Sukkot (or any time of the year).



Ultra-Orthodox Jewish men attend Sukkot prayers holding a palm frond, bound with two other branches, and the fruit of an etrog tree, at the Belz yeshiva during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot in Jerusalem. The week-long holiday commemorates the biblical story of the Israelites 40 years of wandering in the desert and decorated huts are erected outside religious households as a symbol of temporary shelter.

Pictures



Final Day of Sukkot at the Western Wall



Sukkot Harvest Celebration



Four fruit mentioned in the Bible are eaten at Sukkot. The plants are "etrog" (the fruit of a citron tree), "lulav" (a ripe, closed frond from a date palm tree) "hadass" (leaves from the myrtle tree and "aravah" (leaves from the willow tree). The rabbis dictated that the Four Kinds should be held together and waved during the holiday.

Videos



This video shows celebration of Sukkot.



This video shows Sukkot opening ceremony

2.4. Rosh Hashana

Rosh Hashanah (from Hebrew “head of the year”), known as the Jewish New Year, begins the Jewish high holidays, a time of reflection, charity, and new beginnings in the Hebrew calendar. ... Rosh Hashanah falls on a different day each year, usually in September. The 2-day celebration starts at sundown the evening before the first full day. The term "Rosh Hashanah" in its current meaning does not appear in the Torah. Leviticus 23:24 refers to the festival of the first day of the seventh month as "Zikhron Teru'ah" ("[a] memorial [with the] blowing [of horns]"); it is also referred to in the same part of Leviticus as (shabbat shabbaton) or penultimate Sabbath or meditative rest day, and a "holy day to God". These same words are commonly used in the Psalms to refer to the anointed days. Numbers 29:1 calls the festival Yom Teru'ah, ("Day [of] blowing [the horn]"), and symbolizes a number of subjects, such as the Binding of Isaac whereby a ram was sacrificed instead of Isaac, and the animal sacrifices, including rams, that were to be performed. The origin of the Hebrew New Year is connected to the beginning of the economic year in the agricultural societies of the ancient Near East. The New Year was the beginning of the cycle of sowing, growth, and harvest; the harvest was marked by its own set of major agricultural festivals.



Rosh Hashanah celebration



*The Custom of Tashlich on Rosh Hashanah
The word “Tashlich” means “You will cast away.” In this context, it refers to a custom dating from at least as early as the fourteenth century, but probably much earlier, based on the last verses of the Book of Michah (Micah) 7:18-20.*

The central observance of Rosh Hashanah is hearing the sounding of the shofar, the ram’s horn. It is a mitzvah to hear the shofar on both mornings of the holiday (except if the first day is Shabbat, in which case we only blow the shofar on the second day).

The first 30 blasts of the shofar are blown following the Torah-reading during morning services, and as many as 70 are then blown during (and immediately after) the Musaf service. As with every major Jewish holiday, women and girls light candles on each evening of Rosh Hashanah and recite the appropriate blessings. On the second night (or if lighting after nightfall on the first night), make sure to use an

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existing flame. Think about a new fruit that you will be eating (or garment that you are wearing) while you say the Shehechyanublessing. People eat festive meals every night and day of the holiday. Like all other holiday meals, we begin by reciting **Kiddush** over wine and then say the blessing over bread. The bread (traditionally baked into **round challah loaves**, and often sprinkled with raisins) is dipped into **honey** instead of salt, expressing our wish for a sweet year. We do this on Rosh Hashanah, Shabbat Shuvah (the Shabbat before Yom Kippur), in the pre-Yom Kippur meal and during Sukkot.

When someone meets a fellow Jew on the first night of Rosh Hashanah, wish him, “Leshana tovah tikatev v’tichatem,” or, for a female, “Leshana tovah tikatevee v’tichateme” (“May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year”). After the first night, wish them a “G’mar chatimah tovah” (“A good inscription and sealing [in the Book of Life]”). Much of the day is spent in the synagogue. The evening and afternoon prayers are similar to the prayers said on a regular holiday. However, the morning services are significantly longer. The holiday prayerbook—called a **machzor**—contains all the prayers and Torah readings for the entire day. The most significant addition is the shofar-blowing ceremony.

Pictures



It is time for reflection and repentance and is referred to as the “day of judgement” or the “day of repentance”. One of the most significant rituals of the holiday is the blowing of the shofar, or ram’s horn. It is used as a call to repentance during the High Holy Days.



The ritual of Tashlich – the symbolic casting away of one’s sins



Celebration of Rosh Hashanah in the Temple Israel of Miami



The video gives some practical steps on how to celebrate Rosh Hashana.

3. Roman Catholicism

Religious ceremonies are activities conducted or observed on the occasion of the most important or meaningful religious events of the individuals or communities' lives.

In the case of Roman Catholicism, ceremonies can mark important points of the year, with for example the Midnight Mass, the Vigil of Pentecost, the Easter Vigil, or important points of the individuals' lives, for example the Seven Sacraments such as the baptism or the marriage. Other kinds of ceremonies include more frequent or regular events, such as the weekly dominical mass.

The Seven Sacraments, descending from the actions of Jesus Christ and formally codified during the 16th century with the Council of Trent, are some of the most important of the ceremonies regarding individuals, as they are intended to signify and channel the grace of God.

The Seven Sacraments include:

- Baptism (regeneration and initiation into the church signified by the outward sign of water), Confirmation (to strengthen and confirm the Baptism) and Eucharist (the central act of Christian worship), which are the sacraments of initiation
- Reconciliation (spiritual healing through confession) and Anointing of the Sick (or extreme onction, reserved to people that are or might be close to death), which are the sacraments of healing
- and Holy Orders (through which people can put themselves in the service of the Church by becoming priests, bishops or deacons) and Matrimony (the Marriage), which are the sacraments of service.

In addition, certain passages in an individual Christian's life are marked by celebration and special services. These include Baptism, or birth into the Christian church; Confirmation, an informed commitment to membership in the church; weddings; and funerals.



3.1. The washing of feet

One of the most striking traditions of Holy Week is the “washing of the feet” at Holy Thursday mass.

At the Last Supper, Jesus is the “host” and the apostles the “guests”. Washing the feet of weary travellers was a job delegated to a non-Jewish slave by the host. Not even a Jewish slave would be expected to wash feet. The host of a meal would certainly not lower himself to performing this vile task himself. The feet of travellers in ancient Palestine were shod in sandals, and thus filthy from traveling on dirt roads. However, as St. Paul says: «Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant» (Phil. 2,5-7) Jesus himself tells us that the «first shall be last», (Matt. 20,16) and in the washing of the feet he shows his willingness to take on the work of the last and the least.

The reason Jesus washes his disciples' feet is to offer them an example to follow. They are to embrace humility at all times, and to serve one another. As St. Augustine writes: «as [man] was lost by imitating the pride of the deceiver, let him now, when found, imitate the Redeemer's humility».

The rite is performed by the priest during the celebration of the mass In Coena Domini. In 2014 Pope Francis has issued a decree revising the rules for the traditional foot-washing ritual on Holy Thursday, saying the rite should no longer be limited to men and boys, but also include women and young girls. Those participating in the ceremony, the decree says, should be representative of the entire community. The change, Francis wrote, is «an attempt to improve the method of implementation, to express the full meaning of the gesture performed by Jesus at the Last Supper, his gift of himself 'to the end' for the salvation of the world, his boundless charity».

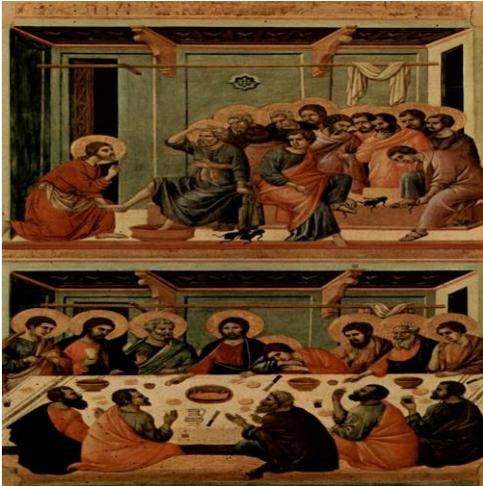
Explaining the meaning of this ceremony, the Pope said: «The Upper Room speaks to us of service, of Jesus giving the disciples an example by washing their feet. Washing one another's feet signifies welcoming, accepting, loving and serving one another. It means serving the poor, the sick and the outcast, those whom I find difficult, those who annoy me».

Pictures



GIOTTO, Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel, 1303-1305

After the scene of Judas' Betrayal on the triumphal arch wall, the story continues on the tier below, on the window-side (right side) of the chapel. Here we have a symmetrical arrangement (an outdoor scene flanked by two indoor scenes) of scenes from the Passion of Christ - the Last Supper, the Washing of Feet, the Kiss of Judas, Christ before Caiaphas, and the Flagellation. The details are very accurate, especially the intensity of the exchange of glances between Jesus and Peter.



DUCCIO DI BUONINSEGNA, Last Supper and the Washing of the feet, Siena, Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, 1308-1311
The washing of the feet and the Last Supper is an autograph painting by Duccio di Buoninsegna belonging to the main register of the Maestà of the Duomo of Siena. The two representations are painted on a single panel to represent the two themes that, in their unity, constitute the heart of Holy Thursday. The Washing of the Feet is told only in St John's Gospel.



JACOPO COMIN called TINTORETTO, Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet, Madrid, Prado Museum, 1548-1549
Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet was a favourite theme of Tintoretto and there are at least six known works by him on the subject. This story from the New Testament (John 13,1-20) called for a complex image with many characters in a variety of poses and motions, and the diversity and challenge attracted Tintoretto. When seen from the right, the painting is extraordinarily coherent. The dead spaces among the characters disappear and the composition appears ordered along a diagonal that begins with Christ and Saint Peter and continues along the table and the Apostles around it, to end at the Arch behind the canal, which is the work's true vanishing point.



SIEGER KÖDER, Jesus Washes Peter's feet,
In his painting Sieger presents the foot washing alongside the elements of bread and wine. Jesus' posture is significant; he stoops to serve man. He reproduces on the canvas the drama and intimacy of the encounter between Jesus and Peter as presented in St John's Gospel.



POPE FRANCIS, Ceremony of Washing of feet on Holy Thursday, Rome, "Our Father" Church Rebibbia New Complex District Prison, 2 aprile 2015

During the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper. Pope Francis washed the feet of 12 inmates and a toddler who lives with his incarcerated mother. «Jesus does not tire of loving anyone, he loves all of us» so much that he gave his life in order «to give life to us, for each one of us ... for you, for you, for me, for them», he said, pointing to the men and women inmates gathered in the "Our Father" chapel in Rome's Rebibbia Prison complex.

Videos



Jesus wash disciples feet - In this scene from The Passion of the Christ, Jesus looks over at the feet of one of the men scourging him...and remembers his time, just the night before, when he washed each disciple's feet. Even Judas... And He said, "I have set you an example."



Pope explains feet washing ritual- During a special Jubilee audience March 12, Pope Francis explained the significance of Jesus' gesture of washing the feet of his disciples.

3.2. Baptism

In Christianity, baptism is the sacrament of admission to the church, symbolized by the pouring or sprinkling of water on the head or by immersion in water. The ceremony is usually accompanied by the words «I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit». In the doctrine originated by St. Paul, it signifies the wiping away of past sins and the rebirth of the individual into a new life.

It is well known that ablution or bathing was common in most ancient nations as a preparation for prayers and sacrifice or as expiatory of sin. In warm countries this connection is probably even closer than in colder climates; and hence the frequency of ablution in the religious rites throughout the East. Ritual immersion has traditionally played an important part in Judaism, as a symbol of purification (in the mikvah, a postmenstrual or ritual bath used by women) or as a symbol of consecration (in rituals

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of conversion, accompanied by special prayers). According to the Gospel, John the Baptist baptized Jesus. Starting from the second century the irreducible minimum for a valid baptism appears to have been the use of water and the invocation of the Trinity.

Initially, for Baptism, were used small, circular Roman buildings that were designated for religious purposes, but because baptism originally was performed on only three holidays, Easter, Pentecost, and Epiphany, enlargement of the older Roman buildings became necessary to accommodate the growing numbers of converts. The new baptistery was commonly octagonal in plan, a visual metaphor for the number eight, which symbolized in Christian numerology a new beginning. As eight follows the “complete” number, seven, so the beginning of the Christian life follows baptism. Customarily, a baptistery was roofed with a dome, the symbol of the heavenly realm toward which the Christian progresses after the first step of baptism.

Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost is the rite by which persons are admitted into the Church of Christ. It is the public profession of faith and discipleship.

The Greek word “to baptize” means “to immerse”. To bathe with water expresses the passage from one condition to another, it is a sign of purification for a new beginning. By virtue of the Holy Spirit, Baptism immerses us in the death and Resurrection of the Lord, drowning in the baptismal font the ‘old’ man, dominated by sin which separates him from God, and giving birth to the new man, recreated in Jesus.

The symbols of Baptism are: water, two kinds of oil, baptismal garment and candle. Water is a symbol of divine life, grace, new birth, growth, power, deliverance, cleansing and the covenant.

The Oil of the Catechumens represents salvation as well as the strength and power that come from Christ our savior. Sacred Chrism represents salvation, participation in the priesthood of Christ, membership in the body of Christ and a share in eternal life.

The baptismal garment is a white garment either worn from the beginning of the ritual or given after pouring or immersion. It is an outward sign of the person’s Christian dignity. It also signifies that the person has become a new creation and has been clothed with Christ.

The baptismal candle is lit from the Easter Candle. The candle represents the risen Jesus, who is the light of the world (Jn 8:12). Jesus is the light that guides every baptized person. It also represents the flame of faith, which is to be kept burning brightly.

Pictures



MARKO IVAN RUPNIK, - CENTRO ALETTI, *The Baptism*, 2016, Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian, Concorezzo (MB).

The one who was born in a stable, adored by the Magi, with Baptism in the Jordan River accepts the condition of sinners, lets himself be united to them by accepting the condition of Lamb of God that with death "takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1 , 29). For this reason the body of Jesus is portrayed as dead, as a place in the tomb and the outstretched arms appear immobile.



ANDREA DEL VERROCCHIO, LEONARDO DA VINCI and OTHERS, *The Baptism of Christ*, 1475-1478, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

On the banks of the River Jordan in Palestine, Jesus is being baptised by St John, who is wetting Christ's head with water. St John the Baptist is holding a slender cross and a scroll inscribed with the announcement of the Saviour's advent: ECCE AGNUS DEI [QUI TOLLIT PECCATA MUNDI] ("Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" John 1, 29). Also present at the event are two kneeling angels, one of whom is holding Jesus' clothes.

It was usual, in 15th-century artist's studios, for the studio head to design the piece, leaving the secondary parts to be painted by pupils and collaborators. It is likely that on the panel with the Baptism of Christ, as well as Verrocchio and Leonardo, another, older painter also worked on the piece.



Neonian Baptistery, 4th century, Ravenna.

Founded by the bishop Ursus, therefore after the year 396, it was built before the transferral of the capital from Milan to Ravenna. The baptistery, whose floor is dominated by a marble arch, is famous for the mosaics in the cupola commissioned by Bishop Neonius. The central mosaic represents the Baptism of Christ, depicted as a young man immersed to the hips in the sheer waters of the river Jordan. This is one of the oldest mosaic scenes of the Baptism of Christ housed inside a monumental building.



The Baptistery of St. John, 12th century, Florence.

The Baptistery of San Giovanni, one of the most ancient churches in Florence, sits opposite the city's cathedral, the church of Santa Maria del Fiore. Octagonal in plan, it is totally clad in slabs of white Carrara and green Prato marble. It is covered by a dome of eight segments resting on perimetral walls, but the dome cannot be detected from the outside because it is concealed by the walls being raised above the arcade on the second level and crowned by a flattened pyramidal roof.



Adult Baptism.

Adults who ask for baptism normally receive it on Holy Saturday during the Easter Vigil. Parishes welcome these new Catholics through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

Videos



St Michael's Catholic Church: Baptism- Presentation of the rite of baptism and its meaning



Easter Vigil 2015 | Adult Baptisms- Ceremony of immersion baptism for Adults. On April 4, 2015 at the Easter Vigil, Fr. John Riccardo baptized nine people into the Roman Catholic Church at Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church in Plymouth, Michigan.

3.3. Midnight mass

There are four liturgies of Christmas of the Roman Catholic Church: The Christmas vigil and the mass at midnight, on December the 24th, and the mass at dawn and mass during the day, on December the 25th.

Of those, the Midnight Mass is the most important, as it celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. It is traditionally held around midnight, when Christmas Eve becomes Christmas Day, but can also be held at an earlier time, and is then called Mass during the Night.

The Midnight Mass was originally a succession of three masses (from a 7th century tradition). Then, since the 19th century, these masses were regrouped into the Midnight Mass.

We can see the Midnight Mass as the celebration of the passage from the darkness to the light. Indeed, it can be linked to Isaïe 9:1-6 where the birth of the Christ is announced by a light in darkness: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. [...] For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given".

Pope Francis commented on this passage on the occasion of his 2013 Midnight Mass as such: "This prophecy of Isaiah never ceases to touch us, especially when we hear it proclaimed in the liturgy of Christmas night. This is not simply an emotional or sentimental matter. It moves us because it states

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the deep reality of what we are: a people who walk, and all around us – and within us as well – there is darkness and light. In this night, as the spirit of darkness enfolds the world, there takes place anew the event which always amazes and surprises us: the people who walk see a great light. A light which makes us reflect on this mystery: the mystery of walking and seeing.”

Pictures



Pope Francis and a Baby Jesus figurine- Pope Francis venerating a figurine of the baby Jesus at the start of Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican (Dec. 24, 2017)



Bethlehem Midnight Mass

Picture by Donatus (Darko Tepert), CC BY-SA 2.5

Video



Midnight Mass in New York

Picture by Patrick Sweeney, CC BY-SA 2.0



Example of midnight mass : the Papal mass of 2017

4. Eastern Orthodoxy

4.1. Introduction

The Holy rites of the Eastern Orthodox Church are divided into Divine Services and Mysteries.

According to Orthodox theology, the purpose of the Christian life is to attain mystical union with God - theosis. This union is understood as both collective and individual. All Orthodox ceremonies and the entire life of the church are arranged to guide the faithful towards theosis.

The Mysteries (also known as Sacraments) are established by the Lord Jesus Christ. The ritual prayers and actions of the minister invoke the grace of God, which invisibly manifests itself, cleanses, rejuvenates, supports, sanctifies and save us. Catechisms will often speak of the seven great mysteries: Holy Communion, baptism, Chrismation, confession, unction, matrimony and ordination. The services of the church are conducted each day according to the church calendar. Parts of each service remain fixed, while others change depending on the observances prescribed for the specific day in the various cycles. The divine services are conducted in the church and involve both the clergy and faithful.

Worship services can only be performed by male persons duly prepared, elected and ordained for this holy ministry. The Orthodox Church has three graceful degrees of clergy: Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Deacon. Worship is a sacred action. This creates the need for appropriate clothing. Since the early years of Christianity, the Church has established special liturgical garments for the priests. These robes symbolize the authority of the Ecclesiastical servants who pray for the grace of God, manifested in the sacred actions; they are a symbol of hierarchical ministry.

The Orthodox Church has three liturgical cycles:

- Daily cycle
- Weekly cycle
- Annual cycle

There are nine daily prayer sessions beginning at sundown. The traditional daily cycle of services is as follows:

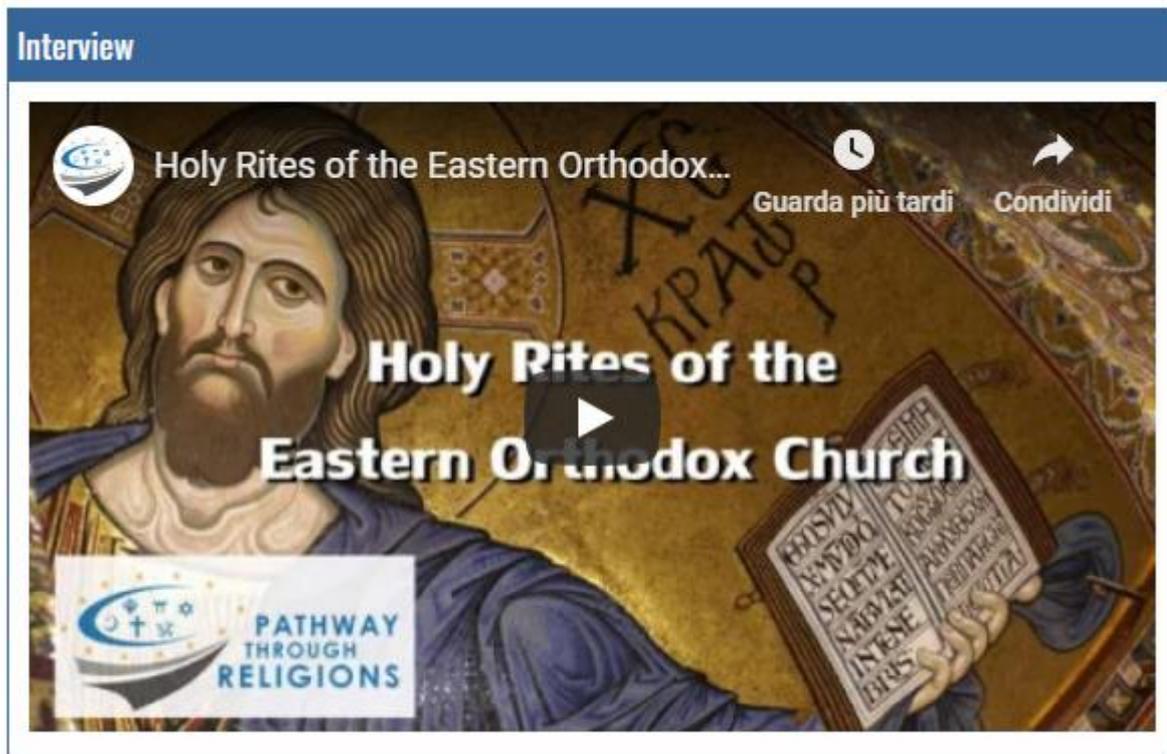
Service	Time	Dedication
Vespers	At sunset	Glorification of God, the Creator of the world and its Providence
Compline	At bedtime	Christ's Harrowing of Hell after His death
Midnight Office	At midnight	Christ's midnight prayer in Gethsemane; a reminder to be ready for the Bridegroom coming at midnight and the Last Judgment
Matins	Morning watches, ending at dawn	The divine light, Christ the Savior
Prime	At 6 AM	Christ's being brought before Pilate
Terce	At 9 AM	The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
Sext	At noon	Christ's crucifixion

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None	At 3 PM	Christ's death
Typica	Follows Sext or None	The Beatitudes

Each day of the week has its own commemoration:

- Sunday—Resurrection of Christ
- Monday—The Holy Angels
- Tuesday—St. John the Baptist
- Wednesday— Christ's sufferings and the Cross
- Thursday—The Holy Apostles and St. Nicholas
- Friday—The Holy Cross
- Saturday—Mother Mary, all Saints and martyrs and the departed



4.2. Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy is the primary worship service of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The rite is not merely symbolic, but is seen as transcending time and the world. Through participating in, The faithful receive the Holy Mysteries and unite in worship in the Kingdom of God.

The service includes the reading of Scriptures and sometimes a homily. The gifts of bread and wine are offered and consecrated and the faithful then partake of them in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

The Divine Liturgy is at the center of Christian Orthodox worship. It is a remembrance of the Last Supper of the Lord Jesus Christ with the apostles, of His redeeming death and resurrection. The liturgy symbolically depicts the more important moments from the earthly life of Christ. It is a bloodless sacrifice of the faithful. The Divine Mystery of the Eucharist recreates the Last Supper as it is believed that the consecrated bread and wine become the real Body and Blood of Christ, and that by partaking of it the faithful jointly become the Body of Christ.



Holy Communion- Children assisting the deacon receive Holy Communion.

In the early Church there were many liturgical rites. Today only three are canonically used in the Eastern Orthodox Church:

- The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom - served on most days of the year and as a vesperal liturgy on the Feast of Annunciation.
- The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great – served 10 times during the liturgical year - on the five Sundays of Great Lent, and on Saint Basil's feast day. On the eves of the Nativity and Theophany, and on Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday, it is celebrated as a vesperal liturgy.
- The Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts - served during Great Lent on Wednesdays, Fridays, and a handful of other occasions, and also on the first three days of Holy Week. It does not contain Anaphora (Eucharistic Prayer), as the Holy Gifts having been consecrated and reserved at a previous Divine Liturgy.

The structure of the Divine Liturgy is fixed, although the specific readings and hymns vary with season and feast. The service consists of three interrelated parts:

1. Liturgy of Preparation - This part of the Liturgy is private, performed only by the priest and deacon. It symbolizes the hidden years of Christ's earthly life. The sacred servers enter the church, venerate the icons and put on their ceremonial vestments. The priest and deacon prepare the bread and wine for the Eucharist at the Table of Oblation (Prothesis)

2. Liturgy of the Catechumens – recalls the early years of Christ's life. It begins with the priest raising the Gospel Book, making the sign of the cross with it over the Altar and proclaiming: "Blessed is the kingdom of



Eucharistic elements - The Gifts (Bread and Wine) prepared during the Liturgy of Preparation before the beginning of the Divine Liturgy.

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the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages", to which the congregation answers "Amen." After chanting the Gospel, the priest will often give a homily on the Scripture, the season, or the present festival or commemoration. The service continues with the Litany of Fervent Supplication, which is marked by an insistent triple repetition of "Lord, have mercy." On certain days this litany is followed by the Litany for the Departed. The Liturgy of the Catechumens concludes with praying for the continued growth of the catechumens in faith, leading up to the day of their baptism.

3. Liturgy of the Faithful - represents the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. After reciting the Creed and completing the Anaphora (the great eucharistic prayer), the service reaches its culmination with the Mystery of the Eucharist, one of the seven great ecclesiastical sacraments. All the faithful receive the sanctified bread and wine, thus uniting with the Body of Christ and taking a part of the Divine essence. In the past Church, only baptized members who could receive Holy Communion were allowed to attend the Liturgy of the Faithful. Today this is not observed anymore, with very few local exceptions (e.g., Mount Athos).

Pictures



Eastern Orthodox Service- Ukrainian Orthodox Church 2018



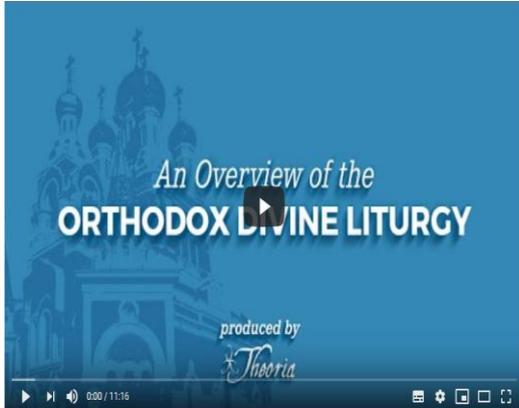
Sunday Liturgy- The head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Metropolitan Epiphany serves Sunday Liturgy at St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kyiv on December 16, 2018.



Pentecost after feast - Metropolitan. Anthony serving a Divine Liturgy at the St. John of Rila Spiritual Seminary in Sofia, 2018.

Video

An Overview of the Orthodox Divine Liturgy



In this video, "An Overview of the Orthodox Divine Liturgy," Frederica explains why we do things the way we do in the Orthodox Church and what you might experience if you endeavour to visit an Orthodox Church for the first time.

Vested in Grace: The Liturgical Dress of Orthodox Clergy



In this video, viewers will see a deacon, priest, and bishop vest for a Divine Liturgy. Each vestment will be seen, its significance and history briefly discussed, and the prayers the clergy recite when placing the garment on will be shown. The video can be used as a supplement to study of the Divine Liturgy, worship in the Church, or on the roles of the clergy in the Church.

Liturgy Of St. John Of Chrysostom



Performed by Andrey Zaboronok and The Bolshoi Theatre Children's Choir

Beautiful Orthodox Divine Liturgy



Excerpt of a Russian Orthodox service.



Patriarchal Divine Liturgy at Saint Alexander Nevski Church, Sofia

4.3.Easter Vigil

The Great Easter Vigil is an elaborate ceremonial service which celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus.



Agape Vespers-The Liturgy of love is served in the Christ the Savior cathedral, Moscow, Russia, 2017.

This is the most important event of the Orthodox liturgical year as the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the Christian faith. The faithful witness the miracle, spread the Good News that Christ has risen from the dead and are redeemed.

During this service people are baptized and that adult catechumens are received into full communion with the Church.

On Saturday night, the Paschal Vigil begins around 11:00 pm with the chanting of the Midnight Office. The epitaphios depicting the dead body of Christ is solemnly venerated for a last time and then ceremoniously taken into the altar and laid on the

Holy Table in enactment of the burial of Jesus. Afterwards, all of the lighting in the church is extinguished except for the unsleeping flame on the altar. Where possible, the Holy Light arrives from the Holy Sepulchre during Holy Saturday afternoon and it is used to light anew the unsleeping flame.

The faithful remain in silence and darkness until the stroke of midnight. Then, the priest lights a single candle from the eternal flame on the altar. The Holy Doors are opened, after which the priest exclaims "Come receive the light from the light that is never overtaken by night, and glorify Christ, Who is risen from the dead!". After this proclamation, the priest approaches the congregation with the Paschal trikirion (lit from the unsleeping flame), spreading the fire from person to person until everyone holds a lighted candle.

The clergy lead a procession outside the church, which circles around the building, while singing hymns of praise to the sound of the church bells. This recreates the journey of the Myrrh Bearers as they journeyed to the Tomb of Jesus on the first Easter morning. The procession stops in front of the closed doors of the church. The opening of these doors symbolized the rolling away of the stone from the tomb by the angel. The Paschal greeting "Christ is risen!" "Truly He is risen!" is exchanged for the first time.

All enter the church joyfully singing the Troparion of Pascha. Paschal Orthros begins with an Ektenia (litany) and the chanting of the Paschal Canon. The Divine Liturgy follows, and every Orthodox Christian is encouraged to confess and receive Holy Communion on this holiest day of the year.

A breakfast usually follows, sometimes lasting till dawn. Eggs which dyed in red are blessed by the priest and distributed to the people for the breaking of the Great Lenten fast. At the end of the service, the Artos, a large loaf of leavened bread, which represents the Resurrected Christ, is blessed. It is then set next to the Icon of the Resurrection and is venerated by the faithful and carried in processions throughout the following week.



Paschal procession- The traditional candlelit procession at midnight recreates the journey of the Myrrh Bearers as they journeyed to the Tomb of Jesus on the first Easter morning. Footage from Kiyev, Ukraine, 2017.

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On the afternoon of Easter Day, the joyful service Agape Vespers is celebrated and the Great Prokeimenon is chanted. A lesson from the Gospel is read in as many different languages as possible, accompanied by the joyful ringing of bells.

The week that begins on Easter Sunday is called Bright Week, and is considered to be one continuous day. The Holy Doors of the iconostasis remain open from the moment they were opened at midnight throughout all of Bright Week. Most of the unique festive features of the Paschal services continue through the week. Following the Liturgy there is a festive procession outside of the church every day. The entire week is a fast-free period.



Paschal trikirion- Spreading the Holy fire, Easter Vigil in Bucharest, Romania 2017.

Pictures

The descent of the Holy Fire in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, 15 April 2017.



Spiritual light- Large crowds of believers gather to witness the miracle of the Resurrection of Christ and spread the Good news. Footage from Tirana, Albania, 2017.

Miracle of the Holy Fire in Jerusalem



Ritual Breads- The ritual breads are an indispensable part of the Balkan folk tradition. The solemn rites of preparation and intricate decorations, rich with spiritual symbolism make the ritual worthy for a bloodless sacrifice.

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Videos

Thy Resurrection - Eastern Christian Chant



A short but moving song for the Resurrection Matins service. It is performed by the Monks of the Pecherska Lavra (Monastery of the Caves) in Kyiv, which is currently under the control of the Russian Orthodox Church. The hymn is a three time repetition of the following short verse, which though sung in Slavonic is shown below in modern Cyrillic alphabet and an English translation.

European Easter: Greek Orthodox Celebrations



This segment of Rick Steves' European Easter traces Greek Orthodox Easter celebrations. In the town of Nafplio (two hours south of Athens), we attend the series of packed, candlelit, incense-augmented services that mark the events of Greek Orthodox Holy Week.

Moscow Orthodox Patriarchate - Good Friday Service



The miracle of the holy fire



The ceremony is held in Jerusalem every year at the great Saturday in the church of the holy sepulchre one of the holiest places for the Christianity.

Christ has risen



Paschal hymn performed by the Bishops Choir of the Lithuania Orthodox Church.

His holiness Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Cyril



Christians in Bethlehem welcome Holy Fire



Thousands of Christian worshippers celebrated Easter's Holy Fire Ceremony on Saturday (April 7) at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem which is believed to be built on the site of Jesus Christ's crucifixion, burial and resurrection. The Holy Fire is considered a miracle occurring every year on Holy Saturday, the day preceding Orthodox Easter Sunday.

4.4. Great Blessing of Waters

The use of holy water is based on the Baptism of Jesus by St. John the Baptist in the River Jordan. In the Orthodox interpretation, St. John performed a baptism of repentance, and the people came to have their sins washed away by the water. Since Jesus had no sin, but was God incarnate, his baptism had the effect of blessing the water, making it holy. The rites of Greater and Lesser Blessing of Waters have been established by the Church to reproduce the miracle of Christ. Holy water is used throughout Christendom as a way of invoking God's blessing and protection.

The Baptism of Jesus is commemorated by the Eastern Orthodox Church on the Great Feast of Theophany. On this occasion, holy water is blessed twice: at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on the eve of the feast, and on morning of the feast itself.

The service includes singing hymns of the Theophany and selected Scripture readings (Isaiah 35:1-10, Isaiah 55:1-13, Isaiah 12:3-6, and 1 Corinthians 10:1-4), culminating in the baptism account from the Gospel of Saint Mark (1:9-11) followed by the Great Litany. The clergy and the faithful then form a procession led by the cross to the nearest body of living water.

Following a lengthy set of didactic prayers that expound on the nature of the feast and recounts the Salvation history, praising God's creation of and mastery over the elements, the priest makes the Sign of the Cross over the water with his hand and prays specifically for the blessing to be invoked upon it. At the climax of the service, the priest casts a cross in the waters. A number of volunteers dive to recover the cross. The person who gets the cross first swims back and returns it to the priest, who then delivers a special blessing to the swimmer and their household.



The blessing of the water and a religious procession before bathing at the Tolga Convent on the Volga River. Orthodox believers celebrating the Feast of the Epiphany.

If the cross freezes inside the water, it is believed that the year will be healthy and fruitful. All the faithful wash at the spot where the cross was cast in the waters and the sick are sprinkled with the blessed water to be healed by its miraculous powers.

In Bulgarian folk tradition, it was customary that only young men dived in the water to recover the cross. However, the Orthodox Church does not explicitly prohibit women from participating in ritual.

After the cross has been recovered, the priest blesses the entire church and congregation with the newly consecrated water. All come forward to be sprinkled over the head with the Holy Water as they kiss the cross. The priest then sets out to bless the homes of all of the faithful with the sanctified water. In monasteries the Hegumen blesses the cells of all of the monks.

Christian Orthodox theology teaches that the Great Blessing of Waters rite actually changes the nature of the water so that the blessed water is no longer corruptible and remains fresh for many years. This miracle has been attested to as early as St. John Chrysostom.

The Great Blessing of Waters is normally performed only once during the year – on the Great Feast of Theophany. However, at the consecration of a temple, a Great Blessing of Waters will often precede the service.

Videos



Велик БОГОЯВЛЕНСКИ Водосвет РИЛСКИ МАНАСТИР



Theophany Crucession - Litany procession at the Rila monastery



Theophany Troparion -Religious hymn honouring the Baptism of Christ.



Theophany feast in Kalofer 2018 - Aerial footage



Epiphany celebrated at Moscow's Christ the Saviour Cathedral

Hundreds of believers gathered at Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow, Wednesday, to attend Orthodox Christmas mass, led by Patriarch Kirill.2016



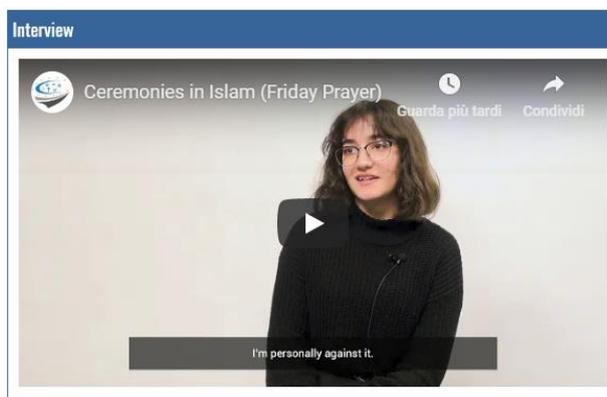
Recovering the Cross -Theophany celebrated in Bourgas 2019

5. Islam

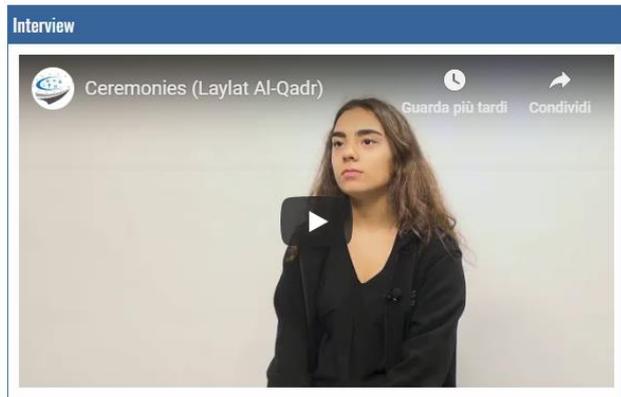
5.1.Introduction

In Islam, like any other faiths ceremonies (or rituals) take an important place in the daily life of the believers. There are five important features in Islam that are called the five Pillars of Islam. They are:

- Declaration of faith: “There is non worthy of worship except Allah, Muhammed is the Messenger of Allah.
- Salat: Five daily prayers on defined times of the day.
- Zakat: Contribution a certain percentage of one’s wealth to the poor.
- Fasting during the month of Ramadan.
- Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca that must be made at least once in a lifetime based on the economical and health conditions).

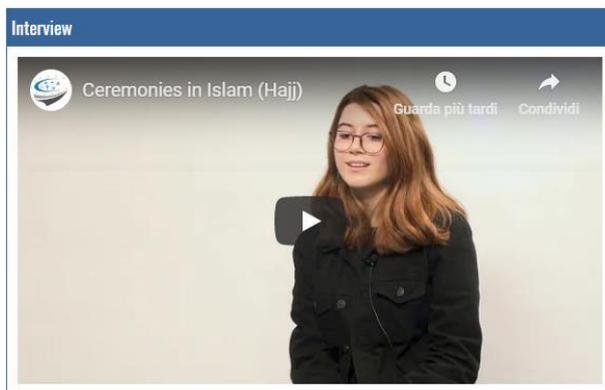


[Interview](#)

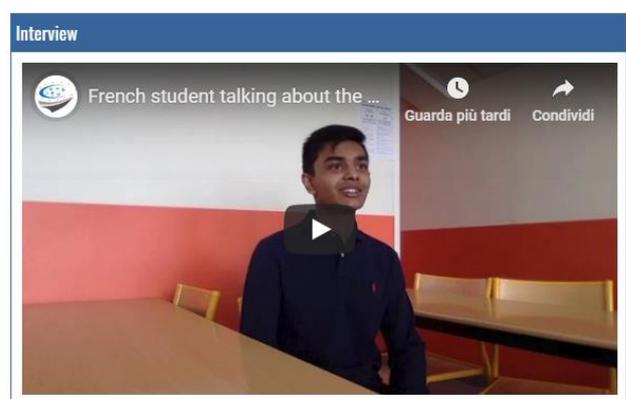


[Interview](#)

Being one of the elements of the Five Pillars, daily praying forms an inevitable part of the practicing Muslims. But in secular countries like Turkey, even majority of the population defines themselves as Muslim, surveys show that relatively small portion of the population sticks to regular daily praying. On the other hand a larger portion of the population attends Friday Prayer and morning prayers of the two important feasts.



[Interview](#)



[Interview](#)

There are important days observed by the Muslims around the year of among which we can name

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Laylat al-Qadr (Kadir Gecesi) or (Lailat al-Miraj, Ascension, Miraç). On *Laylat al-Qadr* (the Night of Decree) is commemorated as the night when the first verses of the Quran were revealed to the prophet Muhammad. *Lailat al-Miraj* is the night when prophet Muhammad traveled to Jerusalem and then ascended to heaven.

Pilgrimage has always been important in various faiths but pilgrimage to Mecca for the Muslims, at least once in a life time, means fulfillment of the duties on earth and compared to the other elements of the Five Pillars, it has been the most difficult one from various points of view such as finance, health, logistics etc.

5.2. Friday Prayer

Praying five times a day is one of the Pillars of Islam. These are *fajr* (before sunrise), *zuhr* (noon), *asr* (afternoon), *maghrib* (after sunset), *isha* (evening). During the Ramadan evenings there is also an additional prayer called *taraveeh*.

Even prayers with congregation is encouraged, it is possible to pray the daily prayers anywhere available and alone taking the timing right. However, on Fridays, the noon prayer *zuhr* is replaced by *Jum'a* prayer. The name in Arabic of the day is *Jum'ah* meaning "the day of assembly". Muslims assemble in the mosques for the mid-day prayer as well as to listen to the sermon (*khutbah*). All adult males are expected to attend the Friday Prayer.

The call for prayers in Islam is called *adhan* (tr. *ezan*) and when the *adhan* for Friday Prayer is heard, all males should leave their worldly pursuits and assemble in the mosques. In the bigger town in Turkey, it is possible to see notes on the windows of the shops stating that the owner is off to mosque for Friday Prayer and be back soon. In most of the Islamic countries Fridays are the week holiday. In secular countries like Turkey, the weekend days are Saturday and Sunday. The civil servants working in the public offices are tolerated if they go for Friday Prayer.



On Fridays a special congregational prayer is made in the early afternoon, which is required of all Muslim men.

Before each prayer, including the Friday Prayer, one has to clean himself/herself, a process called ablution. This process requires washing the hands up to the wrist three times, cleansing the mouth by



Each week on Friday, Muslims are required to take a bath, dress in their best clean clothes, wear perfume and assemble in the mosque for Friday Prayer.

rinsing it with water three times, cleansing the nostrils, washing the face three times, washing the forearms three times, cleansing head from the front down to the neck with the wet hand, then the ears. The process ends with washing the feet.

Muslims take their shoes off at the entrance of the mosque, which is covered by carpets. While men pray in the main hall, women are allowed to pray in the space reserved for them which is generally located on the rear side of the hall.

Muslims pray towards Mecca, the direction defined by an apse called *mihrab* where *imam* stands and

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leads the prayer. Each prayer is composed of different numbers *raka'as*. Each *raka* constitutes a standing position called *qiyam*, then bowing position called *ruqu* and two prostrations called *sajdah*. At the end of two *raka'as* one remains in a sitting posture called *quadah*. The worshipper recites certain phrases and prayers from Qur'an.

Another important part of the Friday Prayer is the sermon given by the imam on *minbar* (pulpit).

Pictures



Directly before this prayer, worshippers listen to a lecture delivered by the imam or another religious leader from the community. This lecture reminds listeners about Allah, and usually directly addresses issues facing the Muslim community at the time.



Friday Prayer is a convention for the Muslims to reassure themselves and confirm their religious bonds and social solidarity on moral and spiritual foundations.

Video



Friday Prayer must be said in a congregation led by an Imam.



A video about How To Attend a Muslim Friday Prayer Service

5.3. Laylat al-Qadr (the Night of Decree)

On *Laylat al-Qadr* (the Night of Decree) is commemorated as the night when the first verses of the Quran were revealed to the prophet Muhammad. It is also translated as the Night of Decree, or the Nights of Glory. Prophet Muhammed did not mention exactly when it happened but most scholars believe that it happened on one of the odd-numbered night during the month of Ramadan but traditionally it is celebrated on the 27th day of the month of Ramada.

The day on which *Laylat al-Qadr* is celebrated changes every year due to lunar calendar. The Islamic calendar is based on lunar cycle and the year is about eleven days shorter than the solar calendar. The Muslim year starts from the day when prophet Mohammed migrated from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD, which is known as Hijra.



Laylat Al Qadr is considered the holiest night of the year for Muslims, and is traditionally celebrated on the 27th day of Ramadan.

Being the first communication with prophet Mohammed that will pave the road to a immense faith, this evening is regarded being more valuable or better than a thousand months. The importance of this night is also mentioned in a *hadith*, which are sayings of the prophet and recorded by his companions. According to the Prophet whoever worships that night out of sincere faith, all his past sins will be forgiven.



It is known as the "Night of Power," and commemorates the night that the Koran was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, beginning with the exhortation, "Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists)"

Falling on the month of Ramadan, which is already a very spiritual period for the Muslims full of rituals of worship, this night becomes a summit for spiritual cleansing for the Muslims of whom some practice almost uninterrupted prayers during the evening.

In Turkey, various organizations are held mostly in the mosques where people congregate to pray and listen to Qur'an being recited. Since it is the time of Ramadan, people stay up until *sahoor* (the only meal Muslims have before dawn until sunset during the month of Ramadan).

Pictures



Muslims do make an extra effort to pray for forgiveness and read the Koran during the last 10 days of Ramadan. This is viewed as period when prayers are answered and blessings are abundant.



They can go to the mosques and pray with the congregation together.



It is believed that all prayers at this night is accepted by Allah and come true.

Video



A short video about Laylat al-Qadr.

5.4. Hajj (Hadj, pilgrimage to Mecca)



Once a year, Muslims of every ethnic group, colour, social status, and culture gather together in Mecca and stand before the Kaaba praising Allah together.

Pilgrimage has always been important in various faiths but pilgrimage to Mecca for the Muslims, at least once in a life time, means fulfillment of the duties on earth and compared to the other elements of the Five Pillars, it has been the most difficult one from various points of view such as finance, health, logistics etc.

Hajj takes places during *Eid al-Adha* which falls about ten weeks after the *Eid al-Fitr* (the feast celebrated right after Ramadan).

The visual impact of millions of people of the same faith but of all kinds of ethnic origin getting together in Mecca is quite strong. According to records more than 2 million pilgrims were in Mecca for Hajj in 2018. Even it is possible to visit the holy places in Mecca and

Medina (where the tomb of prophet Mohammed is located), being there during *Eid al-Adha* (the Feast of Sacrifice) is the most prestigious one.

Men dressed up in *ihram* during the pilgrimage. They dress up themselves with two white sheets of

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seamless cloth. Women are dressed up simple and do not cover their faces.

Ka'aba is the holiest place for the Muslim towards which they no matter where they are on Earth. It is believed to have been built by prophet Abraham and it is a simple square stone construction. During Hajj the Muslims are supposed to walk around it seven times. Then they walk between two small hillocks in the neighborhood, Safa and Marwah seven times. This is in commemoration of Hagar, the mother of Ismael, the son of Abraham looking for water for her son. The water spring she found is now called Zamzam which is about 20 meters east of Ka'aba.

After this (on the 8th of the month Dhul Hijjah) pilgrims leave Mecca for mount Mina where they spend the night. Then they proceed to Muzdalifa and stayed there. On the 10th of Dhul Hijjah the pilgrims throw seven pebbles at *Jamrat al-Aqaba*, one of the three pillars representing the Satan. The same day pilgrims offer the sacrifice an animal (goat, sheep or camel) at Mina.

After the sacrifice the male pilgrims shave their heads.

People in Turkey who made pilgrimage began to be called *Hacı* (Hadji), which is a prestigious title (or nickname).



It is a ritual that is designed to promote the bonds of Islamic brotherhood and sisterhood by showing that everyone is equal in the eyes of Allah.

Pictures



For Muslims, the Hajj is the fifth and final pillar of Islam.



The Hajjis or pilgrims wear simple white clothes called ihram to strip away all markers of social status, wealth, and pride. In the Hajj all are truly equal.

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Mecca is a place that is holy to all Muslims.

Video



A short video about Hajj.

6. Anglicanism and Protestantism

6.1. Anglicanism



[Interview](#)

6.1.1. Christenings and Baptism

Infant baptism is considered to be a part of Christening. Christening is a ritual by which a newly born is said to be “introduced” or “brought” to Jesus Christ. In christening, though the child is named from before, the church has to announce the name of the child to make it known that the child is named so. Christening is also a means by which a church blesses the child. This is done so that the child is blessed by God throughout his life. Though christening is believed to be a ritual by which the child accepts the faith, this is not so. According to Christianity, it is up to the child to choose its faith and no church has the authority to forcibly make a child choose their faith.



A christening is an important event to Christian parents as it introduces a young baby to the church.

Godparents are among the most important people at a christening, who make big promises to encourage their godchild to grow in faith and commit to helping them understand how to live their life in a Christian way.

Alongside the godchild's parents, they role includes;

- Giving time to the godchild to talk to about the bigger questions of life – questions about hope, faith and love.
- Model and encourage them to develop Christian values – being kind and compassionate towards others, being generous towards others in need with time or money and standing against things in the world that cause injustice and suffering.
- Pray for the godchild through the ups and downs of their life and their faith journey.
- Show them practically how to make good choices in life, for themselves and for others. This might mean talking to them about how to stay healthy, how to resist temptations that can harm us and other people, how to care for God's amazing world and how to handle peer pressure as they grow older.
- Help them to learn more about the Christian faith, through their church and in other ways. Going to church with them, talking about what the Bible shows us and helping them learn how to pray are all brilliant ways to support your godchild.

6.1.2. Confirmation

Confirmation is a sacrament, ritual or rite of passage practised by several Christian denominations. The word means strengthening or deepening one's relationship with God.

Confirmation is a popular practice in the Church of England. It enables a baptised person to confirm the promises made on their behalf at baptism. It is also a sign of full membership to the Christian community and the Church of England.

In Christian confirmation, a baptised person believes that he or she is receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. A bishop usually conducts the service but there are variations in how it is carried out.

In the Anglican Church, the sacrament of confirmation is conferred through the laying of hands.

Confirmation can be held at any age. In the Church of England this is usually when a person becomes a teenager and the person are old enough to understand the significance of their promises.

Christians believe Jesus instituted the sacrament or rite of confirmation when he promised to send another counsellor to empower his disciples to bear witness. (John 14:16; John 15:26; John 16:13).



Confirmation comes after a Christening and allows the older members of a Church to confirm their faith to the God and the church.

The roots of the practice of confirmation are found in the Acts of the Apostles:

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptised in the name of

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the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:14-17

Preparing for confirmation

Confirmation candidates attend a series of special classes to learn about the sacrament, their faith and Christian responsibilities. Confirmation preparation helps candidates to have a proper understanding of how to live as a follower of Christ. At one time, candidates were required to learn a series of questions and answers by heart known as the catechism. Today's classes are more comprehensive and the particular needs of candidates will be borne in mind.

Where confirmation takes place

Most Christians are confirmed in the church they normally attend. People can also be confirmed in another church where a large group of candidates from different churches come together.

6.1.3. Wedding

Christians believe that marriage is a gift from God, one that should not be taken for granted. It is the right atmosphere to engage in sexual relations and to build a family life. Getting married in a church, in front of God, is very important. A marriage is a public declaration of love and commitment. This declaration is made in front of friends and family in a church ceremony.

The history of marriage

Marriage vows, in the form "To have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part", have been recited at UK church weddings since 1552.

But before the wedding service was written into the Book of Common Prayer, marriages were much more informal: couples could simply promise themselves to one another at any time or place and the spoken word was as good as the written contract.

Church of England weddings

Marriage in the Church of England

If you choose to get married in church, there is an added dimension - the assurance that God cares about your relationship and that His resources and strength are available to help you. Including God in your marriage doesn't mean that you will avoid all the usual ups and downs, but you will know that you can look to God for help and guidance and that His love will sustain you. You will also have the support of the Christian Church family.

Your Marriage in the Church of England

Where can couples marry?

A couple may marry in their local Church of England parish church if either the man or woman lives in the parish. Before 2007, they could not be married in another parish unless they had attended church services there for six months and were on its electoral roll.

In July 2007, however, the Church of England initiated a change in the law to make it easier for couples to have a church wedding in a parish other than their own. The changes make it easier for a couple



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to marry in a church where there is a family or other special connection.

The following are qualifying connections:

- One of the couple was baptised or confirmed in the parish
- One of the couple has (at any time) lived there for a period of six months or more
- One of the couple attended services there for six months or more
- A parent of one of the couple lived or attended services there for six months or more
- A parent or grandparent of one of the couple was married there

The meeting of the General Synod on Saturday 7 July 2007 unanimously approved the draft measure. Because the Church of England is the official state church, the measure had to be approved by the Parliamentary Ecclesiastical Committee before going through both Houses of Parliament and receiving Royal Assent. It is expected to become law in autumn 2008.



A wedding in the eyes of God is seen as an important rite of passage and to some makes the vows more important.

Before the wedding

Before the ceremony, there are several things the couple must do. Firstly, they must arrange to have their *banns* (a public announcement of a forthcoming marriage) read out on three Sundays during the three months before the wedding. They must be read out in the parishes of both people. If the banns cannot be read out for any reason, a special licence can be issued by the bishop of the diocese.

Secondly, the couple must speak to the priest about hymns and prayers they may want on the day. Many couples want to include extra touches, such as flower arrangements or musicians.

Some churches offer marriage preparation, where the priest will discuss subjects such as money, conflict, communication and sex. This throws up possible problems which the couple may come across during their marriage, and helps suggest ideas for handling them.

A Church of England wedding ceremony

The ceremony itself has a fairly uniform order:

- Beginning the service: the priest welcomes the congregation and then reads out what Christians believe in marriage.
- Declarations: the couple make their promises in front of God that they will love, comfort, honour and protect their partner as long as they both shall live.
- Vows: The couple then make their vows to one another:

To have and to hold
from this day forward;
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,



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till death do us part

Traditional Church of England wedding vows

Rings: The couple exchange rings and say:

With my body I honour you,
all that I am I give to you,
and all that I have I share with you,
within the love of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



Wedding – A video of a traditional Church of England Wedding.

Traditional words for the exchange of rings

- Proclamation: the priest tells the couple that they are now husband and wife.
- Prayers: prayers are said for the couple. They may include a prayer for the gift of children, but this is optional.
- Readings and sermon: there will be some readings from the Bible and the minister gives a sermon.
- Signing of the register: the bride and groom, along with two witnesses, sign the register, which is a legal requirement. They receive a legally binding marriage certificate.

Videos



Confirmation – A video of a Church of England Confirmation service.



Christening – A video of a traditional Church of England Christening.

6.2. Protestantism

The protestant Church is made up of a lot of different denominations and their religious practices vary significant variations are in Baptism rather than a Christening as in the Church of England. Instead of a Christening of a baby some protestants choose to dedicate their children to God and later these children then decide as adults if they wish to be baptised. Other ceremonies share the same practices.



6.2.1. Baptism

Being baptised is in some ways is like a special welcome into a local church. But it is much more than this. Baptism is a sign that someone has turned from ('repented of') living to please themselves and instead has chosen to live God's way. Some Christian churches baptise infants. Others wait until a person is old enough to decide for themselves, showing this in "believer's baptism."

One reason why Christians choose to get baptised is because Jesus himself was baptised. He also asked his disciples to baptise others as a sign of their commitment to living life differently. In the Bible, the Gospel of Matthew records these words as the last thing Jesus said before he returned to heaven:

"I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the



The Baptism pool in a Baptist Church being blessed before the ceremony.

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commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28: 18-20)

Jesus asked it, so Christians do it! When an infant is baptised, the parents and Godparents make promises on their behalf. When the child is old enough, they may make their own promise to live as a Christian in a confirmation service. Churches that do not baptise infants may have a service of “dedication” or “thanksgiving”, to say “thank you” to God for the child and to pray for the family. What does Baptism mean?

For many Christians, baptism is an outward symbol of something happening on the inside. The word for this is a sacrament: something ordinary in itself, but that has a sacred (special) meaning. In this case, the meaning is that someone has turned to Jesus and wants to follow him and his ways.

There are two big things that baptism in water symbolises:

- **Getting clean.** When people do things that displease God, it’s almost like getting dirt on your soul. Water is used for washing. Through baptism, Christians show that they have been made clean by receiving God’s forgiveness for the things they have done wrong.
- **Moving from death to life.** If you saw somebody lying still on the floor, you might think that they were asleep, or perhaps worse. If they were to sit up, you would think they had woken up. When Christians are baptised by immersion – pushed backwards under the water and then brought up again – they show that an old way of living has gone. The old person is dead and a new person is alive, ready to start living in a way that pleases God.

The Baptist Churches ideas on baptism are slightly different as baptism occurs in adulthood. To members of the Baptist church baptism is a very special moment on the journey of faith. It is a moment when God's presence and blessing meets us, and when we make our personal commitment of faith in Jesus as Lord. It signifies the end of our old life and of being born again to new life in Christ. Normally taking place by full immersion in water, it speaks of repentance and cleansing, of being united with Christ in his death and resurrection, and of witnessing to the call of God upon our lives.



Adult baptism often involved full emersion in water to symbolise the Baptism of Jesus.

Baptism is also about receiving God's Spirit for service in the church and in the world.

The vast majority of Christian churches affirm baptism as a moment when we receive God's gift and respond in faith, but not all practise believer's baptism. Many baptise those who are too young to make their own response of commitment to Christian discipleship, and so parents make promises on their behalf that are later 'confirmed' by the person themselves when they are of an age to do so.

Many Baptists will want to welcome and affirm those who have a different story to tell of how they have been baptised and come to faith, while still declaring our conviction that believer’s baptism is the pattern that is set out for us in scripture:



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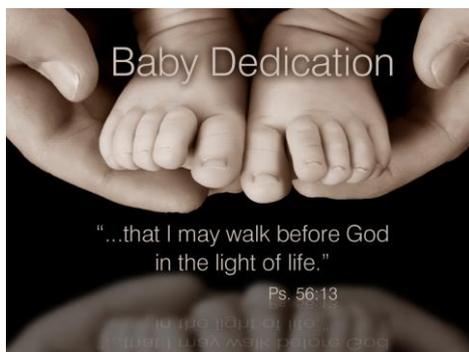
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- Jesus set an example: Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22).
- Jesus commands us: In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), Jesus says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.
- The early church practised it: On the Day of Pentecost, Peter tells the people to “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37-38).

There are other examples of baptism throughout the book of Acts which suggests believer's baptism was an integral part of early church life.

6.2.2. Baby Dedications

In the majority of Protestant denominations that practice it, child dedication is a symbolic ceremony undertaken by Christian parents soon after the birth of a child. Some churches perform these ceremonies en masse and have several couples and children participating at the same time. The rite is intended to be a public statement by the parents that they will train their children in the Christian faith and seek to instill that faith in them. The congregation often responds through responsive reading or some other method to affirm that they, as a church family, will also seek to encourage the parents to



Some parents choose to have their children dedicated rather than baptised.

bring up the child in the faith. There is no implied salvation in the ceremony, and it varies from church to church.

The idea of dedicating a child to the Lord can certainly be found in the Bible. Hannah was a barren wife who promised to dedicate her child to God if He would give her a son ([1 Samuel 1:11](#)). [Luke 2:22](#) begins the account of Mary and Joseph taking Jesus to the temple after forty days in order to dedicate Him to the Lord. This was slightly more involved since it involved a sacrifice, but once again this ceremony did not indicate any level of salvation.

Child / baby dedication is not one of the two ordinances—baptism and the Lord’s Supper—required of Christians in the New Testament. As Christians, we are baptized and participate in the Lord’s Supper as outward and public signs of what Christ has done within us. While baby dedication is not an officially instituted ordinance of the church, there does not seem to be any conflict with Scripture as long as parents do not view it as assuring the salvation of the child.

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Videos



Baby dedication – Video showing a dedication ceremony



Baptism – A video explaining and showing the meaning of Adult Baptism

7. Other major religions

7.1. Buddhism

7.1.1. Meditation

Meditation is a mental and physical course of action that a person uses to separate themselves from their thoughts and feelings in order to become fully aware.

It plays a part in virtually all religions although some don't use the word 'meditation' to describe their particular meditative or contemplative practice.

Meditation does not always have a religious element. It is a natural part of the human experience and is increasingly used as a therapy for promoting good health and boosting the immune system.



Anyone who has looked at a sunset or a beautiful painting and felt calm and inner joy, while their mind becomes clear and their perception sharpens, has had a taste of the realm of meditation. Successful meditation means simply being - not judging, not thinking, just being aware, at peace and living each moment as it unfolds.

What is Buddhist meditation?

In Buddhism the person meditating is not trying to get into a hypnotic state or contact angels or any other supernatural entity.



Meditation involves the body and the mind. For Buddhists this is particularly important as they want to avoid what they call 'duality' and so their way of meditating must involve the body and the mind as a single entity.

In the most general definition, meditation is a way of taking control of the mind so that it becomes peaceful and focused, and the meditator becomes more aware.

The purpose of meditation is to stop the mind rushing about in an aimless (or even a purposeful) stream of thoughts. People often say that the aim of meditation is to still the mind. There are a number of methods of meditating - methods which have been used for a long time and have been shown to work. People can meditate on their own or in groups.

Meditating in a group - perhaps at a retreat called a *sesshin* or in a meditation room or *zendo* - has the benefit of reminding a person that they are both part of a larger Buddhist community, and part of the larger community of beings of every species.

7.1.2. Mandalas

One of the richest visual objects in Tibetan Buddhism is the mandala.

A mandala is a symbolic picture of the universe. It can be a painting on a wall or scroll, created in coloured sands on a table, or a visualisation in the mind of a very skilled adept.

The mandala represents an imaginary palace that is contemplated during meditation. Each object in the palace has significance, representing an aspect of wisdom or reminding the meditator of a guiding principle. The mandala's purpose is to help transform ordinary minds into enlightened ones and to assist with healing.



The Tibetan mandala (like the example in this article, which was created in Manchester by monks from Drepung Loseling Monastery near Lhasa in Tibet) contains deities, with the principal deity in the centre of the pattern. The deities who reside in the palace embody philosophical views and serve as role models.

Constructing a sand mandala

According to Buddhist scripture, mandalas constructed from sand transmit positive energies to the environment and to the people who view them. They are believed to effect purification and healing. Mandala sand painting was introduced by the Buddha himself and there are many different designs of mandala, each with different lessons to teach.



The mandala sand painting process begins with an opening ceremony, during which the lamas consecrate the site and call forth the forces of goodness. The monks chant and dance in resplendent dress.

7.1.3. Buddhist customs

Venerating the Buddha

The Buddhist tradition has developed many different customs and practices in different parts of the world. This may take the form of meditating on the qualities of Buddha, and honouring the Buddha or Buddha-figure. A person could honour the Buddha by making offerings to relics or images of the Buddha.

The exchange of gifts

In the Theravada tradition, Buddhist laypersons often give gifts to Buddhist monks but giving is also encouraged more generally, to one another and to good causes.

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In Theravada Buddhism, monks are considered to embody the fruits of Buddhist practice. Monks' responsibility is to share these with lay Buddhists through their example and teaching. Giving to monks is also thought to benefit lay people and to win them merit.

Pilgrimage

Four main centres of pilgrimage sprung up within the first couple of hundred years after Buddha's death which marked key locations in the Buddha's life. Since then other centres have emerged in virtually every area where Buddhism has been established, each with its own practices and customs. The purpose of pilgrimage is to foster a spiritual discipline, to fulfil a vow or simply to travel. It is an important Buddhist practice. Pilgrimage also helps to express feelings of devotion and creates a relationship with the historical figures associated with the pilgrimage site.



Ordination

Admission to the monastic sangha involves two rites of passage:

- Renunciation of the secular life
- Acceptance of monasticism as a novice

Since in many cases acceptance as a monk could not be made before the age of 20, the two rites could be separated by many years. Ordination is an important ceremony in all traditions. In the Theravada, for example, ordination means becoming a monk. To become a Theravadin monk a postulant shaves his head and beard and adopts the yellow robes of the monk. Various vows are exchanged, including the repetition of the Ten Precepts. Then the postulant is questioned about past behaviour and their suitability for the position. If satisfied, the officiating abbot admits the postulant.

Videos



Mediation – A video guide on how to meditate



Mandalas – A video on the meaning of mandalas

7.2. Hinduism

Within Hinduism there is no one deity but thousands of gods and goddesses. Hindus choose to follow and celebrate different gods and goddesses depending on family tradition, circumstances, folklore and status in the community. The scriptures explain the rites but these will differ slightly as outlined above.

7.2.1. Hindu baby rites

Hindu rituals (sanskars) begin before a child is born. Hindus believe that it is the responsibility of each



Mundan. head shaving, the removal of impurities.

individual to continue the Hindu race and therefore soon after a couple are married, a prayer called Garbhadana (conception) is recited for fulfillment of one's parental obligations. During the third month of pregnancy the ceremony of Punsavana (foetus protection) is performed. This is done for the strong physical growth of the foetus. The *Simantonnyana* is performed during the seventh month. This is the equivalent of a baby shower and means 'satisfying the craving of the pregnant mother'. Prayers are offered for the mother and child with emphasis on healthy mental development of the unborn child. Hindus believe that mental state of a pregnant woman affects the unborn child.

Once the child enters the world, Jatakarma is performed to welcome the child into the family, by putting some honey in the child's mouth and whispering the name of God in the child's ear.

Other rituals include a naming ceremony (Namakarna), the Nishkarma (the child's first trip out) and the Annaprasana, (the child's first taste of solid food).

The ear-piercing ceremony (Karnavedha) and first haircut (Mundan) ceremonies are also considered highly significant. These sacraments are performed on both the sexes. Hindus believe that the piercing of a hole in the lower lobes of the ear have benefits of acupuncture. Head shaving is connected to the removal of impurities.



Karnaveda the piercing of the ears which equates to healing and health.

When the child reaches school-going age, the Upanayana (sacred thread) ceremony is performed. The three strands of the sacred thread represent the three vows (to respect the knowledge, the parents and the society) taken before the start of formal education.

7.2.2. Wedding Rites

Hindu sacraments are called 'sanskars' and the sacraments performed at the time of a wedding are called 'Vivah Sanskar'.

This sanskar marks the start of the second and the most important stage of life called the 'Grihista Ashrama' which involves setting up of a new family unit.

Two individuals who are considered to be compatible form a lifelong partnership at this ceremony in which the responsibilities and duties of a householder are explained.

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The precise details and rituals performed in a wedding ceremony vary from region to region and often take several hours to complete. In Britain the same traditions are honoured and can be traced back to where a family originated from.

The main stages of a Hindu wedding are:

Jayamaala

Firstly, the bride's parents welcome the bridegroom and his family at the boundary of the house where the wedding is taking place. A red kum-kum (kind of powder) mark is applied to their forehead. Members from both families are formally introduced, marking the start of relationship between two families. The bride and the bridegroom then exchange garlands (Jayamaala) and declare: "Let all the learned persons present here know, we are accepting each other willingly, voluntarily and pleasantly. Our hearts are concordant and united like waters."



Jayamaala, the first part of the ceremony where garlands are exchanged.

Madhu-Parka

The bridegroom is brought to a specially decorated altar called 'mandap' and offered a seat and a welcoming drink - a mixture of milk, ghee, yoghurt, honey and sugar.

Gau Daan and Kanya Pratigrahan

'Gau' means cow and 'Daan' means donation. Nowadays, the symbolic exchange of gifts, particularly clothes and ornaments takes place. The groom's mother gives an auspicious necklace (mangala sootra) to the bride. Mangla sootra is the emblem of marital status for a Hindu woman. 'Kanya' means the daughter and 'Pratigrahan' is an exchange with responsiveness on both sides. The bride's father declares that their daughter has accepted the bridegroom and requests them to accept her.

Vivaha-homa

A sacred fire is lit and the Purohit (Priest) recites the sacred mantras in Sanskrit. Oblations are offered to the fire whilst saying the prayers. The words "Id na mama" meaning "it is not for me" are repeated after the offerings. This teaches the virtue of selflessness required to run a family.

Paanigrahan

This is the ceremony of vows. The husband, holding his wife's hand, says "I hold your hand in the spirit of Dharma, we are both husband and wife".

Shilarohan and Laaja Homa

Shilarohan is climbing over a stone/rock by the bride which symbolises her willingness and strength to overcome difficulties in pursuit of her duties. Both gently walk around the sacred fire four times. The bride leads three times and the fourth time the groom leads. He is reminded of his responsibilities. The couple join their hands into which the bride's brothers pour some barley, which is offered to the fire, symbolising that they all will jointly work for the welfare of the society. The husband marks the parting in his wife's hair with red kumkum



Shilarohan and Laaja Homa, this is performed by the brides brothers.

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powder for the first time. This is called 'sindoor' and is a distinctive mark of a married Hindu woman.

Sapta-Padi

This is the main and the legal part of the ceremony. The couple walk seven steps reciting a prayer at each step. These are the seven vows which are exchanged. The first for food, the second for strength, the third for prosperity, the fourth for wisdom, the fifth for progeny, the sixth for health and the seventh for friendship. In some regions, instead of walking the seven steps, the bride touches seven stones or nuts with her right toe. A symbolic matrimonial knot is tied after this ceremony.

Surya Darshan and Dhruva Darshan

The couple look at the Sun in order to be blessed with creative life. They look in the direction of the Dhruva (Polar star) and resolve to remain unshaken and steadfast like the Polar star.

Ashirvada (Blessings)

The couple are blessed by the elders and the priest for a long and prosperous married life.

Misconceptions

It is important to clarify two misconceptions about Hindu marriages: arranged marriages and child marriages. Hindu scriptures prohibit use of force or coercion in marriages. Arranged marriages are based on agreement from both the bride and the groom, and should not be confused with forced marriages. Child marriages are now outlawed within Hinduism.

7.2.3. Death Rites

Generally, Hindus believe that life and death are part of the concept of samsara, or rebirth. The ultimate goal for many Hindus is to become free from desire, thereby escaping samsara and attaining moksha, the transcendent state of salvation. Once moksha is attained, the soul will be absorbed into Brahman, the divine force and ultimate reality.

When Death Is Imminent

When a Hindu is approaching death, a priest should be contacted and the priest and the family should gather to be with the dying person. Those present should chant mantras or play a recording of mantras being chanted. When death seems imminent, the body should, if possible, be transferred to a grass mat on the floor. A small amount of water from the Ganges River should be placed in the dying person's mouth. If this is not possible before death, then these actions should take place immediately following the death.

After Death Has Occurred

As soon as death occurs, those gathered will avoid unnecessary touching of the body, as it is seen as impure.

When To Hold A Hindu Funeral

Preparations for the funeral begin immediately. The funeral should take place as soon as possible—traditionally, by the next dusk or dawn, whichever occurs first. A priest should be contacted and can help guide in the decision-making process and direct the family to a Hindu-friendly funeral home.

Organ Donation

Organ donation is acceptable for Hindus, as there are no Hindu laws prohibiting organ or tissue donation.

Embalming

Embalming is acceptable in Hinduism.



Preparing The Body

Traditionally, the body is washed by family members and close friends. Many Hindu funeral homes recognize the importance of the family washing the body and will allow the family to prepare the body. If this is not possible, the funeral home may wash and dress the body. For the ritual washing, the deceased's head should be facing southward. A lighted oil lamp as well as a picture of the deceased's favorite deity should be kept by the deceased's head. Traditionally, for the "abhisegam" (holy bath), the body is washed in a mixture of milk, yogurt, ghee (clarified butter), and honey. The body may also be washed in purified water. While the body is being washed, those washing should recite mantras. Once the body is sufficiently cleaned, the big toes should be tied together, the hands should be placed palm-to-palm in a position of prayer, and the body should be shrouded in a plain white sheet. If the person who died was a married woman who died before her husband, she should be dressed in red.

Viewing, Wake, Or Visitation Before A Hindu Funeral

Hindus generally hold a brief wake before cremation. The body should be displayed in a simple, inexpensive casket. "Vibuti" (ash) or "chandanam" (sandalwood) should be applied to the forehead of a man, and turmeric should be applied to the forehead of a woman. A garland of flowers should be placed around the neck, and holy basil should be placed in the casket. During the wake, family and friends gather around the casket and may recite hymns or mantras. At the end of the wake, before the body is removed for cremation, many Hindus place "pinda" (rice balls) near the casket. At the end of the wake, the casket is removed feet-first and brought to the place of cremation.

Cremation

Traditionally, all Hindus—except babies, children, and saints—are cremated.

Traditionally, the casket is carried on a stretcher and walked to the cremation site, though it is acceptable to transport the body in a vehicle. If a vehicle, such as a hearse, is used for transportation, the eldest male relative (known as "karta") and another male family elder should accompany the casket. It is customary that only men attend the cremation.

Historically, Hindu cremations take place on the Ganges River in India. The family builds a pyre and places the body on the pyre. The karta will circle the body three times, walking counter-clockwise so that the body stays on his left, and sprinkling holy water on the pyre. Then the karta will set the pyre on fire and those gathered will stay until the body is entirely burned. For Hindus living outside of India, there are companies that will arrange for the shipment of the body to India and hold a traditional cremation with a proxy karta.



This picture shows a traditional funeral pyre but this is not legal in Britain where cremations take place in a crematorium.

In the United Kingdom, only crematoriums may cremate bodies. However, most crematoriums will allow for ceremonies before the cremation and will allow for guests to be present at the cremation itself. Thus, most of the rituals may still be observed. The body should be brought into the crematorium feet-first, ideally with the feet facing south. Those gathered may pray, and then the karta will perform the ritual circling of the body. At this point, the body is ready for cremation, and should be placed into the incinerator feet-first. When the body has been fully cremated, those gathered will return home.

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Post-Funeral Reception

Upon returning home, all family members will bathe and change into fresh clothes. Then the family will gather for a meal. A priest may visit the family at home and purify the house with incense.

Hindu Mourning Period and Memorial Events

The day after the cremation, the karta will return to the crematory and collect the ashes. Traditionally, the ashes should be immersed in the Ganges River, though more and more other rivers are becoming acceptable substitutes. For Hindus living outside of India, there are companies that will arrange for the shipment of the cremated remains to India and will submerge the ashes in the Ganges.

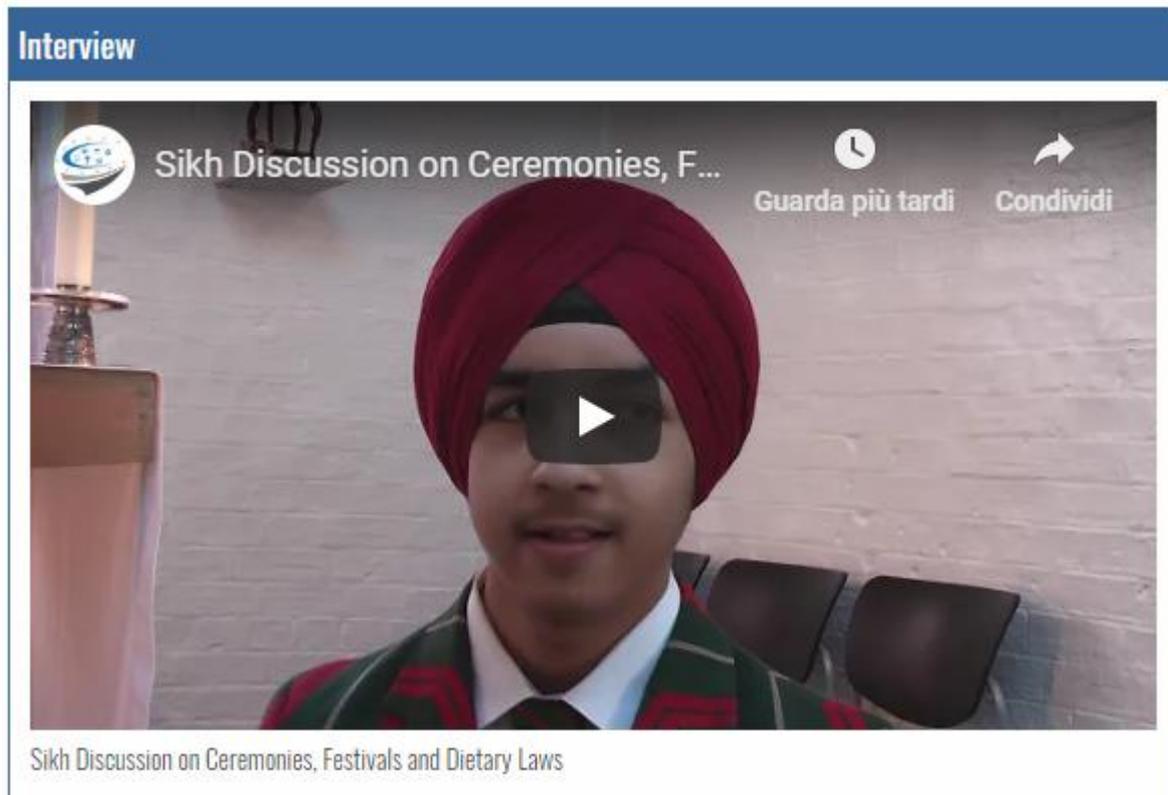


The ashes of dead are traditionally scattered in the Ganges.

The cremation of the deceased marks the beginning of the mourning period, which lasts for 13 days. During this time, the family of the deceased will stay at home and receive visitors, though mourning rituals may differ depending on the community. A photograph of the deceased may be prominently displayed, and a garland of flowers may be placed on the photograph. Throughout the mourning period, the rite of “preta-karma” will be performed, which assists the disembodied spirit of the deceased to obtain a new body for reincarnation.

One year after the death, the family will observe a memorial event called “sradha,” which pays homage to the deceased. The karta will invite Brahmins, members of the highest caste, to the home and provide them with an elaborate meal, treating them as he would his own parents.

7.3. Sikhism



7.3.1. 5 K's

The 5 Ks date from the creation of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The Guru introduced them for several reasons:

- Adopting these common symbols would identify members of the Khalsa
- Because all members of the Khalsa wear the 5 Ks the members of the community are more strongly bound together
- Each K has a particular significance

The meaning of the 5 Ks

The 5 Ks taken together symbolise that the Sikh who wears them has dedicated themselves to a life of devotion and submission to the Guru.

The 5 Ks are 5 physical symbols worn by Sikhs who have been initiated into the Khalsa.

The five Ks are:

- Kesh (uncut hair)
- Kara (a steel bracelet)
- Kanga (a wooden comb)
- Kaccha - also spelt, Kachh, Kachera (cotton underwear)
- Kirpan (steel sword)



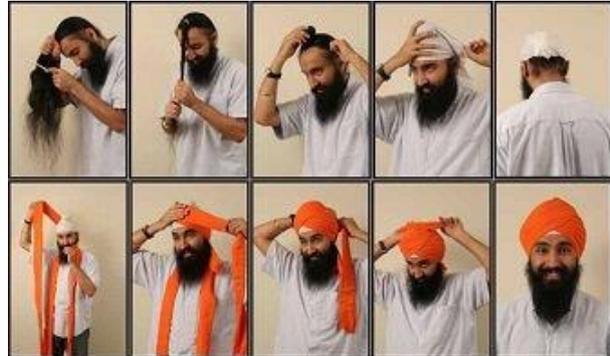
The 5 Ks are the symbols of being a Sikh and today are wore as symbols of a Sikhs faith.

Kesh - uncut hair

Various reasons and symbolisms have been put forward for the Sikh practice of keeping hair uncut.

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- Throughout history hair (kesh) has been regarded as a symbol both of holiness and strength.
- One's hair is part of God's creation. Keeping hair uncut indicates that one is willing to accept God's gift as God intended it.
- Uncut hair symbolizes adoption of a simple life, and denial of pride in one's appearance.
- Not cutting one's hair is a symbol of one's wish to move beyond concerns of the body and attain spiritual maturity.
- A Sikh should only bow his head to the Guru, and not to a barber.
- It is a highly visible symbol of membership of the group.
- It follows the appearance of Guru Gobind Singh, founder of the Khalsa.



Covering the hair can be a complicated and time consuming affair. Some people have the misconception that the turban is the religious symbol but it is the unkempt hair.

Sikh women are just as forbidden to cut any body hair or even trim their eyebrows, as Sikh men are forbidden to trim their beards.

Kara - a steel bracelet

A symbol of restraint and gentility.

A symbol that a Sikh is linked to the Guru.

It acts as a reminder that a Sikh should not do anything of which the Guru would not approve.

A symbol of God having no beginning or end.

A symbol of permanent bonding to the community-being a link in the chain of Khalsa Sikhs (the word for link is 'kari').

The Kara is made of steel, rather than gold or silver, because it is not an ornament.

Kanga - a wooden comb

This symbolises a clean mind and body; since it keeps the uncut hair neat and tidy.

It symbolises the importance of looking after the body which God has created. This does not conflict with the Sikh's aim to move beyond bodily concerns; since the body is one's vehicle for enlightenment one should care for it appropriately.



Some women also choose to wear traditional dress.

Kachha - special underwear

This is a pair of breeches that must not come below the knee. It was a particularly useful garment for Sikh warriors of the 18th and 19th centuries, being very suitable for warfare when riding a horse.

It's a symbol of chastity.

Kirpan - a ceremonial sword

There is no fixed style of Kirpan and it can be anything from a few inches to three feet long. It is kept in a sheath and can be worn over or under clothing.

The Kirpan can symbolise:

- Spirituality
- The soldier part of the Soldier-Saints

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- Defence of good
- Defence of the weak
- The struggle against injustice
- A metaphor for God

For a Sikh the fact that the Guru has instructed the Sikhs to wear the 5 Ks is an entirely sufficient reason, and no more need be said.

The symbols have become greatly more powerful with each passing year of Sikh history.

Every Sikh remembers that every Sikh warrior, saint, or martyr since 1699, and every living member of the Khalsa, is united with them in having adopted the same 5 Ks.

7.3.2. Naming ceremony

Sikh baby rites

Sikhs follow the instructions for all ceremonies (birth, naming and marriage) as set out in the Sikh Rahit Maryada (Sikh code of conduct) and by following the holy book the Guru Granth Sahib.

Prayer is the first action of Sikh women when they find out that they are pregnant. When the baby is born, the words of the Mool Mantar (a key prayer, composed by Guru Nanak) are whispered into the ears of the child and a drop of honey is placed inside the mouth.

It is also customary to visit the temple as soon as it is physically possible after giving birth, this is usually within forty days of the birth of the child.

Once inside the Gurdwara the Guru Granth Sahib is randomly opened by the Granthi (priest) and a passage is read out aloud. The family will then choose a name by using the first letter of the hymn on the page opened. The baby's name is announced to the congregation, the Granthi will also add Singh (lion) as a surname if the baby is a boy, and Kaur (princess) if the child is a girl.

To celebrate, Karah Parshad, a sweet dish made from flour, semolina, butter and sugar, is distributed amongst the congregation.



The Sikh naming ceremony is very special occasion and often the Gurdwara will be overflowing for the special event.

7.3.3. Wedding Ceremony

The Sikh marriage is called Anand Karaj. This form of marriage was introduced from the time of the Sikh Gurus and was given statutory recognition during the British rule in India by the Anand Marriage Act 1909.

According to the centrally approved Sikh Code (Sikh Reht Maryada), persons not professing the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the Anand Karaj ceremony.

Grown-up Sikh boys and girls get married when they are fully able to take on the responsibilities of married life. Child marriage is forbidden. Sikh marriages may be arranged and assisted by parents but this is not necessary. Boys and girls may meet directly and get married. Religious guidance is that a Sikh man and woman should enter wedlock without giving thought to the prospective spouse's caste. An engagement ceremony may take place before the wedding but this is not necessary. Any day suitable to the parties is fixed without regard to any superstition about auspicious, good or bad days. Hindu type of marriage rituals are strictly forbidden.

Most marriages take place in the morning. The ceremony starts with a meeting of the two sides called Milni at which holy shabads (hymns from the Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib) are sung. Often an

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Ardaas (supplication) is also said at the Milni (not prescribed).

The two sides say the Sikh greeting to each other with "Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh" (Khalsa belongs to the Wondrous Giver of Knowledge; to whom also belongs victory.)



Many special ceremonies happen in the Gurdwara such as weddings.

The marriage ceremony takes place at a congregational gathering in the holy presence of Guru Granth Sahib. Shabads (Sikh hymns) are sung and the boy and the girl sit side by side facing Guru Granth Sahib. The girl sits on the left side of the boy. The couple and their parents (or guardians) stand up and an Ardaas is offered, seeking the Blessing of Waheguru (the Wondrous Giver of Knowledge) for the commencement of the Anand marriage.

Any Amritdhari Sikh (man or woman who has undergone traditional Amrit initiation and therefore practices the prescribed Sikh code in daily life) can perform a marriage ceremony. This

officiating person apprises the couple of the duties of married life according to the Guru's teachings. He explains their mutual obligations as husband and wife.

Sikh husband-wife love is modelled on the love between human soul and the Supreme Soul as described in the four lavan (hymns composed by the Fourth Guru in the Suhi raag section of Guru Granth Sahib). The bridegroom and the bride vow fidelity to each other in the presence of the Guru (Granth Sahib) and the holy congregation. They accept their obligations by bowing before Guru Granth Sahib. The Anand marriage is a sacrament and no document is necessary.

The main ceremony is very simple. The bridegroom wears a sash over his shoulder. The end of this is placed (by the bride's father, guardian or any other responsible person) in the hands of the bride. The officiating person reads the four lavan (stanzas) from Guru Granth Sahib.

After the reading of the first stanza, the couple rises and to the accompaniment of music, while the same hymn is sung by the ragis (religious singers), walk slowly round Guru Granth Sahib, the bridegroom leading the bride.

After returning to their position in front of Guru Granth Sahib after each of the four hymns (lavan), they should remain standing while the next stanza is read before commencing the next circumambulation while the same stanza is sung by the ragis. (However, these days, couples prefer to sit down after each circumambulation of Guru Granth Sahib. Apparently, although cumbersome, this seems to have become acceptable.)

After the four lavan, the hymn of Anand Sahib is read by the ragis. There is an Ardaas (supplication) of completion of the ceremony. Holy Vaak (random reading of a hymn from Guru Granth Sahib) is read out and the holy sweet pudding Karah Pasad is distributed to all present.

Summary of what is allowed and what is forbidden

Persons not professing the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the Anand Karaj ceremony.

Child marriage is forbidden.

All Sikh superstitions about good or bad days and rituals before, during and after marriage are strictly forbidden.

Sikhs practise monogamy.

Widows or widowers may remarry.

While husband and wife roles are regarded as complementary (and despite erosion of certain Sikh values due to the proximity and influence of the Hindu majority in India), men and women's equality is enshrined in the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib.

Videos



5 K's- A video of the 5 Ks -



Naming ceremony – A video of a Sikh naming ceremony