

# Children and Holy Communion

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Traditionally, in a Baptist context, the Lord's Table is for the Lord's people. The Table is 'open' to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and are seeking to follow him, but the assumption is that those who come to the Table are in a committed 'covenant relationship' with his people.

In a Baptist context we enter into that covenant relationship when we commit ourselves to the Lord and his people through baptism and church membership. Although they may well love the Lord Jesus and may well in their own way be seeking to follow him, children are not encouraged to take bread and wine: communion is for the baptised. In most Baptist churches communion is not even an issue for children, for the simple reason that they are almost always in their Sunday School classes while the Lord's Supper is being celebrated in the church.

Precisely because in Baptist churches children are not normally present at communion, the Lord's Supper tends to become something of a 'mystery'. The children see the Table laid, but they never see the action of eating and drinking. In our church, we thought it would be helpful to introduce the children to the Lord's Supper by occasionally bringing the children back into church for the communion service. But if they are not able to eat bread and wine, how can we ensure that they do not remain passive spectators? We have experimented in various ways. Most recently we used a liturgy, which encouraged the children (as well as the congregation as a whole) to engage in a series of responsive readings and prayers. To make matters simple, the readings and prayers were all put up on the screen.

For your interest and comment I reproduce the liturgy, which we used on the day of our church anniversary. The children had been in the service for the opening 20 minutes of worship. They had gone to their own teaching sessions while the adult congregation listened to the Scriptures and to the exposition of the Scriptures. The children then returned in the singing of a hymn after the sermon.

Immediately before the Lord's Supper we had the giving of the Peace. I am aware that in some traditions the Peace comes after the eating of Bread and drinking of Wine. However, in our context, this is the moment when, if necessary, worshippers are able to put relationships right - as is suggested by the words of Jesus found in Matthew 5.23-24.

Following the peace, we started the communion liturgy. The words in italics were used by me in my role as worship leader ('president'). The words in bold were used by the congregation. The words in bold italics were used as headings on the screen.

### ***Jesus invites us to come to him***

(As is our custom, we begin the Lord's Supper with an invitation. Usually I begin the say 'This is the Lord's Table, and it is the Lord Jesus who invites all those who love him and seek to follow him to come, eat and drink'. But on this occasion we were all involved in the invitation.)

*The Lord Jesus says:* **Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest**

**Come to me, all of you who are thirsty, and you will never thirst again".**

**Come to me all you who are hungry, and you will never be hungry again".**

*Jesus invites us all, young and old, to come to him. In particular he invites you children to come and know his love. So as the bread is served, we invite you to come to the front and receive a blessing from Martin and David who will be either side of this Table to pray for you. Parents with babies are also welcome to bring their children to be blessed.*

### ***Jesus wants us to remember him***

(At this point I normally read the Words of Institution as found in 1 Corinthians 11.23-26. On this occasion I used a simpler form of words.)

*The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took a piece of bread. He thanked God and, as he broke it, said: "This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me"*

### **Thank you Jesus for loving me**

*After the supper Jesus took the cup of wine. He thanked God and said: "This is my blood, the blood of the new agreement between God and his people, poured out for you. Do this to remember me".*

### **Thank you Jesus for loving me**

***Let us continue to thank Jesus for his love***

***(Instead of a formal Prayer of Thanksgiving, which in our context is always led by one of the deacons, we said together the words of a simple song.)***

***You went to Calvary, there you died for me***

**Thank you Jesus for loving me**

*You rose up from the grave, to me new life you gave*

**Thank you Jesus for loving me**

*You're coming back again, and we with you shall reign*

**Thank you Jesus for loving me**

***We remember Jesus as we break bread***

(The Bread was broken and distributed, and as is our custom, we ate the Bread as we received it as a sign that each one of us must come one by one to the foot of the Cross. During the serving of the bread the children came forward for prayer.)

(After eating the bread we used words from Galatians 2.20)

*Together we say: **The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me***

***We remember Jesus as we drink wine***

(The Wine was served, and, as is our custom we waited until all were served before drinking together, as a sign of our oneness in Christ. During the serving of the wine, a song ('Wonderful grace') was sung.)

(After drinking the wine we used words from Ephesians 1.6,7)

*Together we say: **By the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God!***

***We pray for others***

*(In a Baptist church the minister normally leads in a pastoral prayer at this point. Whenever I take the pastoral prayer I always begins with the needs of the local fellowship, and then goes on to include the needs of the world, before ending with a prayer of rededication. On this occasion the prayers were simplified into just a few responsive sentences.)*

*Gathered together around the table, let us pray for our church family - and in particular let us pray for those who are unwell....*

**Lord, bless all our friends who are unwell at this time**

*At this time when we are looking for another minister, let us pray for God's wisdom and direction*

**Lord, bless our church and in your time provide us with a new minister**

*At a time when many people are losing their jobs and finding finances are tight, let us pray for the government as it seeks to deal with the problems of recession*

**Lord, bless all those who have responsibility for the wellbeing of our country**

*In this Christian Aid week when we remember those less fortunate than ourselves, let us pray for all those who lack such basics as food and shelter*

**Lord, bless all those who seek to help the poor**

*On this church anniversary Sunday let us pray for ourselves in the prayer of Richard of Chichester:*

**Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits you have won for me;**

**for all the pains and insults you have borne for me. O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother, may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day.**

(The service then ended with the singing of a resurrection hymn and the saying of the Grace together as a prayer for one another - as we say the Grace we bind hands together as a sign of our oneness in Jesus.)

How do you respond to the above? Your comments would be welcome!