

# Maundy Thursday Home-based Ritual

This home-based activity was inspired by the Seder, a meal observed by Jewish people to celebrate the Passover. Many Jewish holy days include home-based and family-oriented rituals. So it is in keeping with that, and especially at this time when we are keeping social distance from others out of concern for each other, that we encourage your family to use this at home. This outline for a meal-based ritual can help us recall our own Christian story.



## **Background to the Seder**

Seder is Aramaic for the Hebrew word *erekh* meaning “order.” The festival meal and home service observed on the first and second night of the Jewish Passover is called the “seder” because a certain order is always followed in observing the ritual. The ceremony of the Seder meal includes the retelling of the story of the Exodus and the eating of foods which symbolize both the slavery and deliverance out of slavery the

Hebrew people experienced. The description of the Last Supper in the gospels has been commonly held to be a record of the meal of the first night of Passover, although the Seder as Jewish people celebrate it today may have developed much later.

The gospels record that, on the night before he died, Jesus and his disciples gathered to eat the Passover meal (or “Feast of Unleavened Bread”). Known as Maundy Thursday, or Holy Thursday, on this day Christians recall the meal that the disciples and Jesus ate. The name Maundy probably comes from the Latin *mandatum*, or commandment. It has to do with the commandment Jesus gave his disciples to “love one another.” Before he gave them this commandment, Jesus washed their feet as an example to them to help and serve others.

### **Ahead of Time**

Gather the following:

- Bible
- seven candles (preferably tealites or votive candles in glass holders)
- a basin or bowl
- napkins
- grape juice\* or wine
- peppermint patties\*
- olives and toothpicks
- round crackers
- pretzels
- peanut butter/almond/chickpea spread
- salt & vinegar chips, egg (hardboiled)\*



Make up a plate with the symbolic foods on it—enough for each person to taste. This is meant to be a “sample” not a whole meal.

(\*see suggestions for alternatives below)

### **The Outline for Families/Households**

Share the Background to the Seder (above) in whatever way you wish—by reading this or sharing it in your own words.

An adult or parent begins the ritual with the explanation: **“The foods on the plate are symbolic and will help us to remember the story of the last days and hours of Jesus’ life. We’ll receive each item while listening to a reading from the Bible.”** *(It may also help, with children, to mention that if they don’t like something, they may quietly (and politely) set it to the side, but not to interrupt the readings for everyone else by making a big deal out of it.)*

Begin by placing the plate in the centre of the table and lighting seven candles. *(See Simple liturgy for extinguishing these at the end of the meal.)*

**Opening Prayer:** On the fourth night of this holiest of weeks,  
Jesus gathered with his friends for one final meal—the Passover meal.  
Around him were the men and women and children who had been with him in his work  
in Galilee,  
Many tables later and many years later,  
This table is prepared for us.  
May God be present with us. Amen.

Begin the meal by washing each other's hands. This can be done over a basin or at a sink. Try to do this for each other. *(Added bonus: This is a great time to demonstrate the proper technique of handwashing that we've been hearing so much about!)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liisgnbMfKvI>

Ask someone to read the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet from John 13:1-5 as you pass around a bowl with napkins in it and hand out a napkin to each person. At the end of the reading, place the empty bowl in the middle of the table.

An adult or parent may offer this explanation: **"In the Jewish tradition, at the Seder meal, four children are chosen to ask four questions and the adults give answers. In this way, children and adults learn the meaning of the symbols and hear the story again."** *(If a child is present, have them read the three questions. Adults or older children/youth may participate by reading the responses.)*

Question 1: Why are a basin and towel symbols for this night?

Response: In those days, foot washing was needed in every home. The streets were dusty and dirty. Roads even had garbage and waste from the animals that traveled up and down the same streets. People in those days wore sandals without socks, and their feet could become very dirty. Usually, the servants in the household were expected to wash the feet of guests. Having your guests' feet washed was a way to show honour to your guests.

*(Invite a child to read the second question.)*

Question 2: Why is this called "Maundy Thursday"? What does the word "maundy" mean?

Response: On this night we recall that Jesus gave his followers a new commandment after he washed their feet. (Read John 13:6-15)

*(Invite a child to read the third question.)*

Question 3: What is special about this night? What makes it more special than all others?

At Jesus' last meal with his friends he broke bread and passed a cup among them, inviting them to do this to remember him after he had died. This has become a story at the heart of our faith, and a ritual deeply meaningful for Christians, wherever they are, around the whole world. Let us hear the story of that Last Supper which has become familiar to us in the words we hear each time we celebrate Communion together... (A child or adult reads Matthew 26: 20-30)

### Symbolic Foods

\*We encourage you not to go out to shop just for these items if you don't already have them. Be creative! You might substitute items such as gold foil-covered coins or even carrot "coins" wrapped in tinfoil, cranberry juice, ripple chip or rice crackers dipped in vinegar, etc.

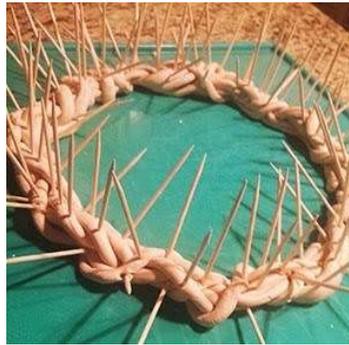
### **Sharing the symbols on the Plate**

Pass the plate around, inviting people to taste the foods as the brief scripture verses relating to each food is read.

1. **Grape juice or wine** – Read Matthew 26:29
2. **Silver Peppermint Patty**– to represent Judas' 30 pieces of silver. Read Matthew 26: 14-16
3. **Olives speared on a toothpick or tiny plastic cocktail "sword"**– symbolic of Jesus' arrest in the garden (at the Mount of Olives). Read Luke 22: 39-53



4. **Cracker with peanut/almond butter and broken pretzel bits around the edge (or braided dough ring with toothpicks)**– symbolic of the crown of



thorns placed on Jesus' head after the soldiers stripped him of his clothing and taunted him. Read John 19: 1-3

5. **Salt and Vinegar Chips-** for when they offered Jesus vinegar to drink and the tears shed by those watching. Scripture- John 19: 16-18, 28-30



6. **Hardboiled egg (on a bed of lettuce/greens)**—symbolic of the stone rolled over the entrance to the grave in the garden (Read Matthew 27:57-60

### **Ritual for Extinguishing the Candles at the Conclusion of the Meal**

This is the night when, after his Last Supper with Jesus, Judas met with the authorities to plan the arrest of Jesus. *(Extinguish one candle.)*

This is the night when all the disciples would leave Jesus alone to suffer. *(Extinguish a second candle.)*

This is the night when even Peter, the most enthusiastic disciples, the one who promised to always stay by Jesus, would deny he even knew Jesus. *(Extinguish a third candle.)*

This is the night, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus prayed that he wouldn't have to go through with the suffering and death to come. *(A fourth candle is extinguished.)*

This is the night Jesus prayed that God's will, not his own, be done. And while he struggled, his friends slept. *(Extinguish a fifth candle.)*

This is the night when Judas arrived with the authorities and soldiers and betrayed Jesus with a kiss on the cheek. Then the soldiers seized Jesus and led him away—alone.  
*(A sixth candle is extinguished.)*

**Prayer for Maundy Thursday:** Loving God, as we remember the last few hours of Jesus' life, help us to keep vigil with you so that we might be witnesses, as the first disciples were, to the good news of Easter. Amen.

*This ritual is adapted from an idea for a "Story of the Passion Lunch for Good Friday" found on the website Catholic Icing. Other materials are reprinted from Youth Spirit 2 by Cheryl Perry. You are welcome to use this!*