

A special meal

It was Anna's birthday, and everything was ready. One candle had been carefully positioned in the middle of the cake. Balloons were hanging from the ceiling. Her grandparents came through the back door with an armload of presents. Soon Anna's brothers were busy teaching her how to open her gifts.



For the birthday lunch, Anna sat in the special place reserved at the head of the table. After the meal, everyone joined in singing "Happy Birthday," and helped Anna blow out the candle on her cake.

This special meal was new to her but as Anna took part in the celebration she felt loved and special, and a part of the family.

She didn't understand what it meant... or did she?

It was David's first communion, and everything was ready. The candles in the chancel had all been lit, and the special banners were hanging in the sanctuary. A family brought the bread they had baked on Saturday, and placed it carefully in the worship space, beside the jug of grape juice.

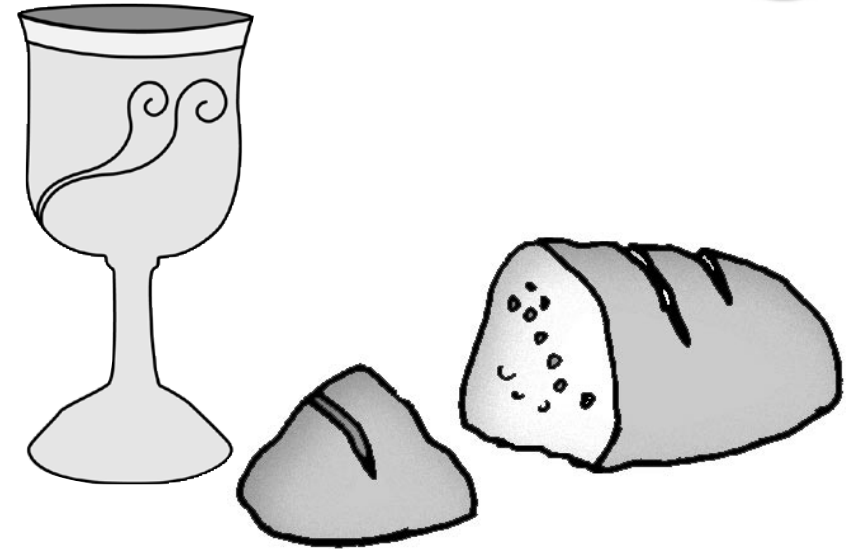
As the worship service began, David sat with his family in a pew near the front of the church. David watched intently as the bread and juice were passed down the pews. As his mother passed the bread to him she said, "The bread of life, David," and he took a piece eagerly. Then David passed the bread to his father and said, "The bread of life, Dad." David did the same with the glasses of juice.



This special meal was new to David, but as he took part in the celebration he felt loved and special, and a part of the family.

He didn't understand... or did he?

Children and Communion



Communion —
the Eucharist —
the Lord's Supper —
the Mass —
is one of the sacraments of the church.

It is a special time when Christians share bread and wine (or grape juice) together and remember Jesus. During the last meal that Jesus had with his friends before the crucifixion, he took a loaf of bread and a cup of wine and shared it with them. Jesus asked his friends to remember him every time they shared bread and drank wine together. And we, as followers of Jesus, still do that today.

Communion: a sacrament of grace

This sacrament is known by different names in different churches:

Holy Communion — the word “communion” means a close relationship; sharing the bread and wine or grape juice is something that we do together in community

The Eucharist — “Eucharist” is a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving”; we give thanks to God for God’s great gift of new life through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection

The Lord’s Supper — this is the Christian family meal; we remember that during Jesus’ last supper with his disciples he said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

The Mass — this name comes from the final words of the traditional Latin words used during the sacrament, “*ite, missa est,*” which means, “Go, you have been sent.”

In the sacrament of Communion, the church acts out the drama of God’s love for humankind. God’s grace comes to us through things we can see and touch and taste. In Communion, God comes to us in the bread and the wine (sometimes called “elements”), symbols that we can touch and taste. We bring to the table bread and wine, which represent our daily life and work. We receive back again the bread and wine, now transformed by God’s Spirit into symbols of God’s love and grace.

For centuries, churches in the western world restricted Communion to those who could “understand” it. In Orthodox churches, on the other hand, children are part of this table fellowship from birth.

Churches today vary greatly in their practices around who participates in the sacrament of Communion. For some congregations, only those who are members of the church can participate. For other congregations, all who are baptized are welcome to share in this sacrament. And for other congregations, all who are present in worship are welcomed at the table.

There are also many different ways that Communion is served. In some churches people go to the front of the church to receive the elements. In other churches the elements are passed among the people. In some churches the priest or minister serves the elements. In other churches members of the congregation, sometimes including children, serve the elements.



Experience has shown that young children can grasp the truth that is enacted in the sacrament of Communion.

- A three-year-old described it as “the church’s sharing service.”
- A six-year-old, on entering the sanctuary and seeing the communion elements in the worship space, said with great feeling, “Oh, I love these Sundays. I love having the bread and juice.”
- A nine-year-old said simply, “I like the Eucharist because I am glad I am a Christian.”

Including children in the sacrament of Communion

As worship leaders...

- invite children to prepare the elements by baking the bread or filling the cups
- include children in the procession of bread and wine to the table if this is your custom
- include children as servers of the bread and wine if this is a practice of your church
- organize a “preparing for Communion” session for families on a Saturday before a service that includes this sacrament
- encourage sessions about this sacrament as a regular part of the church school curriculum — arrange for a time to visit church school classes and speak with children about the sacrament

As parents...

- explain the rituals around this sacrament that are practiced in your church
- if there is liturgy that accompanies the sacrament, help children to learn the words
- talk with children about their experiences of the sacrament
- share some of your own feelings about the meaning of this sacrament
- read the story of Jesus’ last supper with his friends, from one of the gospels (Matthew 26:20–29; Mark 14:17–25; Luke 22:14–38)
- talk about the ways in which this “meal” is similar to and different from a family meal