



## •TIMELINE OF TOPICS•

### Quote

- 1800s: The world's shortest Christian Spiritual Classic: "The Hound of Heaven"

### Early Church

- How fast did Christianity grow in its first year?

### Modern Church

- The varieties of taking Communion

## Taking Communion: How many different ways?

Most Christians churches celebrate Communion, and variations on Communion have developed throughout the history of Christianity. This article will hit the high points concerning Communion, which is also called Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, and Eucharist.

Method: (1) A common cup and bread. Each person eats the bread and drinks out of a common cup, usually a chalice (goblet). Sometimes individuals handle the elements (bread and wine/grape juice) themselves and sometimes they are served. (2) Separate small glasses and bread. Each person gets a tiny glass to drink out of plus bread (either a wafer or a loaf of bread from which you tear a piece of bread to eat). (3) Intinction. Each person dips a piece of bread into a chalice of wine. Or, the minister/priest will dip the bread into a chalice and then place it on the person's tongue. (4) I have heard of a Greek Orthodox Church where the priest holds a chalice filled with wine and bread, and he uses a golden spoon to dip into the wine/bread mixture and serve to each person. (5) Since Covid, taking communion from a "snack pack" has become quite popular. Grape juice is in a small plastic container, which has a plastic film on top with a small wafer, which also has a plastic film on top.

Symbol versus Presence: Three different views. (1) No change takes place. Some believe that Communion is only a remembrance of the Last Supper and nothing happens to the elements. (2) Consubstantiation. In this view, the bread and wine remain just that, there is no change. But Christ does participate with them. As an example, think of heating a bar of iron. A cold bar of iron is iron, and a hot bar of iron is iron. The iron itself has not changed, but "alongside" the iron heat has been added. The hot bar of iron has iron and heat. So in Communion, Jesus comes "alongside" the elements. (3) A spiritual involvement of Christ's body and blood, but not so closely aligned as in consubstantiation. (4) Transubstantiation. Some Christian groups believe that the elements become the body and blood of Christ. This is the method Catholicism favors

Grape juice versus wine: Some Christian groups use grape juice instead of wine. History reveals the reason. In 1800, every Christian group used wine. (Except for Quakers who view Communion as a spiritual and not a physical act. The Salvation Army, developed in the late 1800s, has the same understanding.) Then a revival swept across the young country (the Second Great Awakening) and large numbers of people became Christians. Many of these new Christians looked around their relatively new country and decided to change some things. One thing was to reduce the American drinking habit: So sprang up the Temperance Movement. (Prior to the mid-1800s, alcohol consumption was common, mainly because water purification on a large scale did not exist.) It would culminate in the short-lived 18th Amendment of 1920 which outlawed alcohol. In response to this, some Christian groups decided to switch from wine to grape juice in their Communion services. Once alcohol consumption declined, though, these groups did not switch back to wine but stayed with grape juice. And that is why some use grape juice today.

Over the years, I have asked a number of people why some groups use grape juice. I usually get one of two responses: (1) the fermentation process had not been developed in Jesus' day or (2) someone in the audience might be a recovering alcoholic and so drinking wine might get them back in the habit. But now you know the real reason. And that is the beauty in studying church history.

The most bizarre case of Communion I have heard: At a youth retreat (the pastor told me later), the pastor of a church I used to attend took an apple and used it as Communion. He explained that the juice of the apple represented the wine/blood of Christ and the "meat" of the apple represented the bread/body of Christ. He added that because many associate the apple with Adam's sin, this signified that Jesus' obedience had reversed the sin of Adam.



The world's shortest Christian Spiritual Classic from 1893 (Yes, it is a poem and has 182 lines, but I have edited it down.) You might be familiar with its theme: God is "The Hound of Heaven" (the name of the poem) who seeks after people no matter how they might try to hide from Him. The best line is the last one, but try to read the entire poem instead of just skipping ahead!

"I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways of My own mind;  
and in the mist of tears I hid from Him . . .  
[T]hose strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase, and unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy, they beat—and a Voice beat more instant than the Feet—  
'All things betray you, who betrayest Me.' . . .  
I pleaded . . . for, though I knew His love Who followed,  
yet was I dreaded, because, having Him, I must have nothing else besides . . .  
Across the length of the world I fled . . . I said to dawn:  
Be sudden; to eve: Be soon—With your young blossoms heap me over from this tremendous Lover . . . to hide me from Him! . . . Still with unhurrying chase . . . came on the following Feet,  
and a Voice above their beat—"Nothing shelters you,  
who will not shelter Me." . . . "Nothing satisfies you,  
who is not content with Me.' . . .  
Now of that long pursuit comes on at hand the brute;  
That Voice is round me like a bursting sea:  
. . . "All which I took from you I did but take, not for your harm,  
but just that you might'st seek it in My arms. . . . Rise, clasp My hand, and come. . . . I am He whom you seek!  
You [drove] love from you, who [drove away] Me."

Francis Thompson (1859-1907)

## How fast did Christianity grow in its first year?

This summary looks at the very earliest church history. Our time period: the first year of Christianity. Jesus was crucified in the year AD 30, so we will look at the growth of Christianity from AD 30 to AD 31. The only source of information for that first year is the Bible itself, specifically the book of Acts, although other New Testament books add clues.

Acts begins with Jesus eating with his Apostles. He tells them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes. (1:4,5) That would be his last direct order. The next few verses relate Jesus' words as he tells the Apostles that they would be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (1:8) And then he ascended to heaven.

Before we go any further, let's count the number of believers on earth as Jesus ascends to heaven. We have the eleven Apostles, with Judas having committed suicide, but is there anyone else? The books of Luke and I Corinthians add more. During the ministry of Jesus, he had the twelve Apostles plus he had seventy other guys. Luke describes how "the Lord appointed seventy [or maybe seventy-two] others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go." (Luke 10:1) So at the very beginning of Christianity (which I am defining as the moment Jesus ascended), the number of believers is eleven plus seventy.

But wait because there were others. In I Corinthians, Paul lists the people who saw the resurrected Jesus: "He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time." (I Corinthians 15:5,6) So we have the Twelve (more on that later), the seventy (from Luke) and the 500 "brothers." Even if we assume that the seventy were part of the 500, that leaves over 500 believers at the ascension of Jesus. And that was just the men. If we allow for an equal number of female believers the number is around 1000. So that is the figure at the moment church history starts.

Moving on. As soon as Jesus ascended to heaven, the Apostles went to Jerusalem to wait on the Holy Spirit, per Jesus' last instructions. While they were waiting they decided to replace Judas with another Apostle. They decided the "it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us." (1:21,22) The man they chose was Matthias (1:26) and "so he was added to the eleven apostles." Thus the Twelve mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians probably included Matthias.

Right after that, the Day of Pentecost occurred, when the Holy Spirit came on the Christians. When it happened Peter went out and preached and "about three thousand [men and women] were added to their number that day." (2:41) So within a couple of months after Jesus' ascension the number of Christians had increased to around 4000 believers.

They stayed in Jerusalem, for Acts 2:44 states "All the believers were together." Then Peter healed a crippled man and preached to the amazed crowd. And some believed his message so that the "number of men grew to about five thousand." (4:4). Again, we can double that in order to account for the female believers, so 10,000 believers. Now, we don't know how much time passed between the Day of Pentecost (4000 believers) and the 10,000 believers because Acts 3:1 only states: "One day Peter and John were going up to the temple." But we can assume that it was less than one year.

So there you have it: one year into Christianity, the believers had increased from around 1000 to 10,000. And almost 2000 years later, Christianity numbers around 2.4 billion believers.

Questions or comments contact Mark  
at [marknickens@gmail.com](mailto:marknickens@gmail.com)