

# Rites of Passage

A rite of passage is a ritual, event, experience or ceremony that marks or constitutes a major milestone or change in a person's life. Some examples of rites are:

- Marriage
- Baptism
- Funerals
- Birth

## Baptism

Baptism is the Christian religious rite of passage of sprinkling/immersing water onto a person's forehead, symbolising purification or regeneration and admission to the Christian Church. Baptism is done because Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist and he explicitly told Christians to be baptised after he was resurrected. It is done to welcome Christians into the Christian Family and cleanse them of the original sin of Adam & Eve.

Being baptized is important as it shows your Christian faith. You may show that you accept Jesus Christ as your lord and saviour by getting baptized. This sacrament, which is exclusive to Christians, affirms and welcomes you into the Christian Community. In addition to absolving you of Adam and Eve's original sin, baptism also demonstrates your recognition that the world and humanity were created according to the biblical account.

Baptism matters as John the Baptist baptized Jesus at the start of his ministry. Jesus also instructed his followers on how to get baptized after his resurrection. Being baptized is evidence that you are following Jesus' plan for your life.

### Infant Baptism

In some denominations, Infants are baptised in the name of the "Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" to cleanse them of the original sin and purify them. Godparents are often there and take part as they will be a significant part of the upbringing of the Christian child. There are scenarios where dead people can be baptised. For example, stillborn children. This is a very controversial topic, but many denominations do this (Roman Catholic e.g.) as they believe that these children would otherwise go into a state of "limbo", without the beatific vision of God. Thus, many stillborn children are buried before their funeral.

## Marriage

Marriage is an important rite of passage that is seen by many Christians as the foundation of family life.

### Christian wedding ceremonies

Many Christians marry in church, surrounded by family and friends. Christian wedding ceremonies reflect Christian ideas about the purpose of marriage and have features that are of great religious and spiritual importance, including:

- The congregation 🗨️ sing hymns and say prayers to thank and praise God and ask for his blessing on the couple.
- The priest 🗨️ gives a sermon 🗨️ on the theme of love and self-sacrifice.
- Rings are exchanged, symbolising eternal 🗨️ love and that marriage is a lifelong commitment.
- The couple make important promises, called vows 🗨️, to stay committed to each other.
- The couple sign the marriage register, which is required by law in the UK.

A couple may choose to change some elements of the marriage ceremony. For example, some couples choose to omit the traditional vow where a bride promises to 'honour and obey' her husband. Instead, they might choose to use words that show a more equal partnership.

Some churches perform same-sex marriages, while some churches, such as the Roman Catholic 🗨️ Church, do not marry couples of the same sex.

### Adult (Believers) Baptism

Some families choose a "service of dedication" for their children to be baptised. This allows the child to make the decision when they come of age to make their own decision of whether they want to join the Christian faith while being brought up in a Christian home with their beliefs but it is ultimately their own choice whether they want to join the church or not.

## Marriage

Marriage is the foundation of family life and these ceremonies reflect Christian ideas about the purpose of marriage emphasizing love, commitment, spiritual importance and raising a family. It represents a lifelong commitment, symbolizes love & unity and reflects Christian values about the purpose of marriage.

Marriage is important as it gives you the blessing of God in your relationship, it shows your commitment to each other & your commitment to starting a family and allows a sexual relationship & having children.

At a wedding, rings are given to symbolize their endless & everlasting love due to the circular band having no end. Additionally, vows are read in a Christian ceremony to sow their commitments & promises to each other and to also symbolise how marriage is (mostly) forever.

## Funerals

Funerals take place in a local church. Due to the quote, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25), funerals are seen as a celebration of life as their soul will be joining God in Heaven.

Depending on your denomination, there are different beliefs relating to the afterlife. Some believe in the resurrection of the body and prefer burial or cremation as a result.

Some practices at a funeral include:

- singing hymns and saying set prayers to thank and praise God
- using flowers to decorate the church and the coffin
- using candles to remind mourners that Jesus is the 'light of the world'
- praying for the deceased person's soul (Catholic Christians)

Some Christians believe that rights of passage, such as baptism, marriage, and funeral rites, are essential for spiritual growth and community integration. For instance, in the Catholic tradition, baptism is considered a sacrament that signifies the removal of sins and the start of a new life in Christ[1]. Similarly, the Orthodox Church emphasizes the importance of baptism as a symbol of spiritual renewal and inclusion into the community of believers in Christ. These beliefs highlight the significance of baptism in the Christian faith, as it represents the believer's connection with Christ in his death and resurrection, signifying the start of a new life strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

In contrast, some Protestant denominations may view baptism as a symbolic act rather than a necessary sacrament. For example, in the Protestant tradition, baptism is often seen as a public declaration of faith and commitment to following Jesus Christ, but it is not necessarily seen as a means of spiritual renewal or inclusion into the community[1]. This perspective is reflected in the simpler and less extravagant funeral rites practised in Protestant denominations, which focus more on remembering the deceased rather than on elaborate rituals.

In terms of marriage, the Catholic Church views it as a sacrament that symbolizes the union between Christ and the Church, as well as the union between the couple. The sacrament of marriage is seen as a lifelong commitment, and the Church emphasizes the importance of fidelity and the sanctity of marriage[1]. In contrast, some Protestant denominations may view marriage as a civil institution rather than a sacrament, and may not place the same level of emphasis on its spiritual significance.

Regarding funeral rites, the Catholic Church places great importance on the rituals and ceremonies surrounding death, including the vigil service, funeral mass, and committal service. These rites are seen as a way to honor the deceased and provide comfort to the bereaved, while also affirming the hope of resurrection[2]. In contrast, some Protestant denominations may view funeral rites as less important, focusing more on the celebration of the deceased's life rather than on elaborate rituals.

## Funerals

A very important function of a local church is as a place where funerals are conducted. In the Gospel ❶ of John, Jesus says: I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die (John 11:25). For this reason, Christian funerals, although sad for those who mourn the person who has died, are often seen as 'celebrations of life' because this person's soul ❶ is believed to be joining God in Heaven.

Christian funerals differ according to denomination ❶ and specific beliefs about the afterlife ❶. Some Christians believe in the resurrection ❶ of the body, so they prefer burial over cremation ❶, which destroys the body. This is because the Apostles' Creed ❶ says: I believe in ... the resurrection of the body.

However, some Christians believe that resurrection will be spiritual, as St Paul stated in a letter in the Bible (1 Corinthians 15:44). For these Christians, both cremation and burial are acceptable.

Christian funerals bring comfort and hope of salvation ❶ to the friends and family of the deceased person. Practices that help to bring this comfort and hope include:

- singing hymns and saying set prayers to thank and praise God
- using flowers to decorate the church and the coffin
- using candles to remind mourners that Jesus is the 'light of the world'
- praying for the deceased person's soul (Catholic Christians)

## Question

What term could be used to describe baptisms, marriages and funerals?