



Important Dates:

December 7:
Second Sunday
of Advent

December 24:
Christmas Eve

December 25:
Nativity of
Jesus Christ

January 6:
Epiphany of
the Lord

February 18:
Ash Wednesday

A Reformed Understanding of Communion

What is the Lord's Supper? In the Lord's Supper, I am fed at the table of God's family. Through the bread that I eat and the cup that I drink, the Lord offers me His body and blood. He renews my faith and gives me the gift of eternal life. As I remember that He died for all, and therefore also for me, I feed on Him in my heart by faith with thanksgiving.

In the Presbyterian tradition, the Eucharist is usually administered as unleavened bread with options of wine and grape juice, served not from a chalice, but from individual cups, and passed throughout the congregation by the Presbyters (Elders), though occasionally the people will "come to the table." The elements can be either served together or occasionally separately with 'consecration' for each element respectively. Communion is open to all baptized believers, although usually reserved for those who are members of a Bible-believing church.

The Reformed Position

The Lord's Supper is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ as a memorial of His death wherein, under the symbols of bread and wine, His body as broken and His blood as shed for the remission of sins are signified and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, sealed and



applied to believers. Thereby their union with Christ and their mutual fellowship are set forth and confirmed, their faith strengthened, and their souls nourished unto eternal life.

In this Sacrament, Christ is present not bodily, but spiritually—not in the sense of local nearness, but of efficacious operation. His people receive Him not with the mouth, but by faith; they do not receive His flesh and blood as material particles, but His body as broken and His blood as shed. The union thus signified and effected is not a corporeal union, not a mixture of substances, but a spiritual and mystical union due to the

indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The efficacy of this Sacrament as a means of grace is not in the signs, nor in the service, nor in the minister, nor in the word, but in the attending influence of the Holy Spirit.

Growing in Understanding

A sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible reality. Because young children are concrete in their thinking and do not yet “get” signs and symbols, it is important that we help them in the process of understanding that Communion is a sign of eating and drinking with our crucified and risen Lord.

Talk about bread—how it was a part of the Last Supper (Matt.

26:26), how it is a picture of the Kingdom Banquet (Rev. 19:9), how Christians of all nations are included (1 Cor. 10:16-18), how it’s a celebration and not simply a remembrance of Christ’s death.

Tell them how Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35). Encourage them to talk about what that means.

If your students have questions about Communion, be sure you understand your denominational statement about this Sacrament.

* Question #45 of Belonging to God: a First Catechism, approved by the 210th General Assembly of PCUSA in 1998.





Communion

Through the Eyes of Little Children

Adapt these activities for your toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary students. Consider sending them home for families to use together.

Apple Spice Ornaments

Directions: Before class, stir the cinnamon, applesauce, and glue together in a mixing bowl. Knead the dough and wrap it in plastic wrap. Give each child some of the dough to create an ornament. They could: flatten the dough between sheets of wax paper and cut out shapes with cookie cutters, make coils of dough to create letters and shapes, or any other creative ideas. Punch a hole in the top of each shape with a pencil. Place the ornaments on a cookie sheet to dry for 3–5 days. Pull string, yarn, or ribbon through the hole for a hanger.

Helpful hints:

1. Tell the children that the dough doesn't taste good and is not to be eaten.
2. Keep the ornaments ½-inch thick.
3. Label the ornaments with each child's name so they don't get mixed up.

You will need:

- ◆ Mixing bowl
- ◆ 1-cup ground cinnamon
- ◆ 1-cup applesauce
- ◆ 1/4-cup white school glue
- ◆ Plastic wrap
- ◆ Pencil
- ◆ Spring yarn or thin ribbon
- ◆ Optional: wax paper and cookie cutters



A Meal for Jesus

Communion is a special meal Jesus gave us to remember how much He loves us. We are going to pretend to create a special meal for Jesus. Pick out some pictures of your favorite foods and put them on your plate for Jesus. You can also use crayons to draw other things for Jesus to eat.

With younger children, you should put glue on the children's plates for them and have them stick the pictures on the glue that you put there.

You will need:

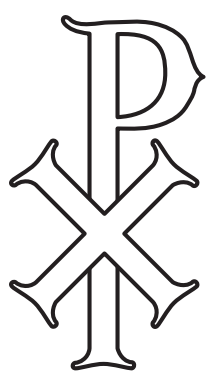
- ◆ Paper plate for each child
- ◆ Cut out pictures with various foods on them (especially foods the kids like); with older children, you could also use stickers
- ◆ Crayons
- ◆ Glue



Jump into Communion with Elementary Students

Adapt these activities for your elementary students. Consider sending the ideas home for families to use together.

Chrismon Ornaments



Chrismons are handmade Christmas tree ornaments with various symbols of Christianity. The name *Chrismon* comes from a combination of CHRIST and monogram. Some of the traditional symbols of Christianity are monograms composed of various combinations of letters of the name *Christ* or titles for Jesus. An early example is the Chi-Rho monogram, composed of the first two letters in Greek of the word Christos (chi, X=ch; rho, P=r).

The Chrismon ornaments are more than monograms—they may also tell about Jesus Christ.

As the designs grew in number, they included references to the life, ministry, activities, and teaching of Jesus. Each

ornament was designed to proclaim a truth about God as seen in Jesus. All Chrismons are made in a combination of white and gold to symbolize the purity and majesty of the Son of God and the Son of Man.

To make a paper Chrismon, photocopy the pattern page onto white copy paper. Trim the paper so you just have the large square. With the design facing up, fold the square in half lengthwise, then in half crosswise, on the dark lines. Cut on the dotted lines, then open up to reveal a Christmas star. Decorate the star with a variety of gold craft supplies using craft glue. When the children are finished decorating, punch a hole in the top of the ornament and put a string through it to make it hang.

You will need:

- ◆ Copies of the Chrismon pattern on page 10
- ◆ Heavy white paper for each child
- ◆ Scissors
- ◆ Gold glitter, paper, foil, sequins, and/or beads
- ◆ Craft glue
- ◆ Hole punch
- ◆ String

The Last Supper: A Drama

Jesus celebrated a special meal with His disciples called the Last Supper. We remember this meal when we celebrate Communion in our church. Read to children

the story from Luke 22:7–23. Have them act out the story as you read. You may need to go through the story again to allow the children chances to play multiple parts.

YOUTH STYLE!

Communion

Communion and shared meals were important aspects of life in the early church. Acts 2:46 tells us that every day the believers “broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”

Plan a progressive dinner with your youth group, eating each course of the meal at a different person’s house. Spend time at each house praising God and thanking Him for all of the blessings He has provided. Also take time during the night to reflect upon God’s grace and the sacrifice we remember through Communion—Jesus’ death on the cross.



TEACHER'S DEVOTIONAL

During Advent, we reflect and prepare for the coming of our King. In Communion we remember the sacrifice that the King made on our behalf, giving us the gift of grace. The Lord's Supper is a meal we share with other believers, not only to remember, but also in order to give thanks to God for His many blessings. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–34.

As you read these words and as you take Communion this quarter, reflect on the words and the meaning of Communion. Where is your heart as you approach the table? How is God speaking to you? The Lord's Supper is a wonderful gift and blessing when we approach it with a humble and thankful heart!

SUGGESTED READINGS: 1 Corinthians 11:23–34



FAMILY ACTIVITY

Family DINNER

Jesus instituted Communion as part of the Last Supper, but that meal was more than just a celebration of the Passover. It was a meal Jesus shared with His beloved friends, the people He loved the most in the world. In that shared meal, Jesus demonstrated His love to these dear friends. Share a meal as a family and spend the evening together as a reminder of how much you care for one another. Work together to prepare the meal and clean up afterward. Read the story of the Last Supper together (Mark 14:12–26), then spend some time in prayer as a family. If you have time, spend the rest of the evening enjoying more family time—play a game, go for a walk, or do something else together.



Threads in the **ROYAL ROBE**

Scripture reveals to us who God is, what He requires of us, and how He shows His love to us in mighty, saving acts of grace. We can never begin to know all there is to know of Him, but our gracious God is able to show us enough of Him in order to have life, health, and peace.

Through the written Word of God, the Holy Spirit teaches us all we need to know of the triune God. We learn what He desires to make known to us.

The Bible does not teach us in neat theological categories. Rather, God makes Himself known through accounts of His work in the lives of real people, through prophecies and prayers, doctrinal teaching, and wise sayings.

When we follow all these threads of truth, we see a pattern emerging—a royal robe woven from the gathered truths of Scripture adorns our King and displays His love.

To see God more clearly, we express what we learn from Scripture in a coherent way, known as the essentials of faith. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed both express the essentials of faith.

The great Reformation confessions of faith further laid out the teaching of Scripture in a

systematic way, weaving together the Golden Threads of Scripture, and bringing forth the royal robe that glorifies Jesus our King. By studying them, we grow in our understanding of God. Such knowledge leads us to put on the robe of Christ by faith. This means that we take our place in union with Him, growing in love and obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The essentials of faith are not all Scripture has to say about God, but they represent the Golden Threads around which the whole royal robe is woven. Under the heading of "Teacher Devotionals," every Bible lesson in this curriculum is keyed to the Golden Threads it expresses. The Stray Threads section picks up additional ideas or notes the ways in which the Golden Threads may get distorted.

Believers in the Reformed tradition are a people who celebrate that God can be known because He has graciously made Himself known. A crucial part of our faithfulness is learning and studying the essentials that have been revealed. So, we offer these in hopes of enriching every Bible lesson, enabling you as a teacher to trace the threads of Christ's Royal Robe in the teachings of Scripture.

1

ESSENTIAL NUMBER ONE:

The One True God is the Triune God of Grace—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Whom Alone We Must Worship and Serve

In the Old Testament, we learn that the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the creator of the entire world and the constant redeemer through the mighty acts of the people Israel. In the New Testament, we see the LORD, Israel's God, actually is the triune God, who reveals Himself to be the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has entered into covenant faithfulness with His people and will not leave us or forsake us.

2

ESSENTIAL NUMBER TWO:

The Eternal Son of God Came to Us as a Human Being in Jesus Christ

In the fullness of time, God the Son took up our humanity as He came to us as Jesus, the man from Nazareth. Jesus is both fully God and fully human. He is all that God has to say to us, in word and deed, about who He is and how He loves us. And Jesus is all we have to say to God, as the one man who lived a life of perfect obedience to Him, on our behalf. In Jesus' relationship with His Father, and in His promise of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, we come to know that the one God is triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3

ESSENTIAL NUMBER THREE:

Holy Scripture is the Word of God Written, Through Which, In the Power of the Holy Spirit, We Truly Meet the Triune God

One of the great achievements of the Reformation was the recovery of Scripture as our sole authoritative source for knowledge of God and its return to the ordinary people of God. The traditions of the church can be helpful in interpreting the Bible but must always remain beneath the written Word of God. The Reformers affirmed at the same time that what needs to be known about God from Scriptures can be known by ordinary people who engage in a plain reading of the Bible. The Bible is clear enough in its essential teaching for all who read with prayerful reliance on the Holy Spirit to speak through the Word.

5

ESSENTIAL NUMBER FIVE:

Humanity Has Fallen Into Sin

The Scriptures teach us that, although God created us good, through our own willful choices, we sinned against Him. The sin of our first parents rocked and wracked the world with terrible consequences. Now, by nature, we are prone to suppress the truth and to choose against our God and our neighbors again and again. There is nothing we human beings do in this world that is without the taint of sin. We are helplessly lost in our sin. This means the death of ever hoping to get to the Father on our own. Such a realization is the beginning of crying out in repentance and faith for the rightness and goodness that only can come from the Lord Himself. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, comes to us as a man and has enacted perfect obedience, free from sin, on our behalf.

4

ESSENTIAL NUMBER

FOUR: The Triune God is Sovereign Over All

Our religion is not simply a human invention. Nor is it subject to human whims for change and supposed corrections. We do not have the freedom to decide who we would like the Lord to be. God is, and He has made Himself known to us, in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. While what we may know of the triune God is true and reliable, we always recognize that we never know all there is to know about Him. The Lord God is high and holy, beyond our grasp and control, and splendid in His glory. God is moving history toward its appointed end. The triune God of grace is in control. He reigns. He alone is Judge. He alone is worthy of our praise. We never have dominion over Him. God alone reigns.

6

ESSENTIAL NUMBER SIX:

We are Made Right with God by Grace Alone through Faith Alone

Our salvation from our sins and our sinfulness is all from Christ Jesus. We never can earn our way into God's favor, whether by our good works, zealous worship, or many prayers. The Father forgives our sins by the work of Jesus Christ alone. Christ's death alone takes away the guilt of our sin. Christ's faith and obedience alone, the living sign of His covenant faithfulness, comprise our reconciliation with God. He gives us Christ's righteousness. Our record before God is replaced with Jesus' record! When this happens, we believe in who Christ Jesus is and what He has accomplished. We confess that He is our Lord and Savior. But even this belief and confession is a gift of God, the result of the Holy Spirit's work inside us. Salvation is all of God. We simply rest in what He has done for us.

8

ESSENTIAL NUMBER EIGHT:

The Holy Spirit Makes Us More and More Like Jesus

Sanctification means "to make holy," and it refers to the work of the Holy Spirit to form Christ in us. For we not only receive a new record of righteousness in Christ, but we receive a new nature. God places His own Spirit within us and a wonderful series of benefits begins:

- ❖ The Holy Spirit unites to Jesus Christ so that all that belongs to Him comes to belong to us (John 16:14-15).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us, fashioning us more and more in the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to the Scriptures so that we might be transformed by hearing the Word (John 14:26).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit prays within us, crying out to the Father for us and through us (Gal. 4:6).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit assures us that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16), and His presence is the gospel of our salvation (Eph. 1:13).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit gives us the power to be faithful witnesses to Christ (Acts 1:8) and enables us to do the ministry and works of Jesus (see Matt. 10:1 and John 14:12).

Of course, the old, sinful nature still remains in us and, thus, the new and the old are in conflict. Christian growth involves a hard struggle. We can never do it on our own. We live in constant need of "the sanctifying work of the Spirit" (1 Peter 1:2). The person of the Holy Spirit then moves us to live in obedience and empowers us to keep going even after we fail or when the way is difficult. His work will continue until we meet Jesus in heaven at last.

7

ESSENTIAL NUMBER SEVEN:

Election: God Chose Us to Be His Children and Servants

God chose us to believe in Him now that we might spend the rest of our lives serving Him and telling others about Jesus. The essential teaching of election is the awareness that we do not make our way to the Father; He has come all the way down to where we are to claim us. Election, then, is not about living a life of ease but living one of service. Those whom He calls, He sends to bring His message to a lost world. If we know Him, it is because He chose us. If He chose us, He sends us to tell others, "Believe the good news and discover your chosenness!"

9

ESSENTIAL NUMBER NINE:

A Life of Obedience

The people of God, Christ's Church, bring His Word and His love to a broken world. We are in the world, even though we do not belong to this world (John 17:16). We serve the world even though we are aliens and strangers here, passing through on our way to our heavenly homeland. Psalm 84 notes that those who "have set their hearts in pilgrimage" to the city of God cause the dry, desert lands to become a place of springs as they pass through. With the Holy Spirit prompting us and empowering us, with the grace of Jesus cleansing us, with the love of the Father beckoning us, we both gather for worship and move out in service to God. So, even though the Church does not belong to the world, it strives to love the world as Christ did.



Chrismon Pattern

Print copies of this pattern for use in your classroom.
You will need one copy for each student.

