

We Believe: **Sacraments** / 1

Mysteries

SYMBOLS OF CHANGE: TRANSFIGURATIONS

Some people think that in Christianity, only spiritual things should be important and not material ones. But God created *both* matter and spirit. He values both. Matter

can be used to show us spiritual things.

Here are some material things: What spiritual things do they represent? (Make a few notes on each.)

How does the water represent something new?



What changes with these rings?





What changes in this person's life?

What do this bread and wine become?



Read John 9:1-12. What did clay from the ground become in Jesus' hands?



Unit IV: Sacraments

Session 1—Mysteries

Key Concept

The sacraments are mysteries by which God transforms our lives and fills us with his Spirit.

Objective

Students will

Relate the Biblical story of the Transfiguration to sacraments as transforming or transfiguring actions of God.

Background for Teacher

In the Armenian Church, as in all Eastern Orthodox churches, the sacraments are called “mysteries”—*khorhoort* in Armenian. This is because in a mysterious way, God comes into our lives and transforms them, fills them with new meaning. He restores us to what we were meant to be—in communion with him. Water, for example, becomes in baptism a “bath of new life”—a way of restoring our lives and putting God at our center. It is still water, but now it has a new meaning and fulfillment. Or perhaps we could say its original meaning—the one it had when God created it and before we fell away from him—this original meaning is restored.

It is this understanding of sacrament, rather than the idea of sacraments as “magical” or merely ritualistic acts, that this lesson and this unit will try to get across.

Note that in this unit, as in Unit II, students will be making a banner on the sacraments. Plan for this as you did before, by having materials ready and an idea in mind about how the banner will be made. Again, try to arrange for the finished banner to be hung somewhere in the church.

Materials Needed

- Bibles
- Paper
- Pens
- Banner makings

Procedure

1. Opening prayer. Read with the class the story of the Transfiguration in **Matthew 17:1-8** and also Luke 9:28-36. Discuss the event by asking these questions:

- Do you think Peter, James, or John could *explain* what happened on the mountain, or how it happened? (No.)

- What did this event show the three men? (That Jesus was indeed God's Son, truly living with them in this world—as they saw when he returned to his normal state afterwards—but also truly of the Kingdom of God.) (10 min.)

2. Use the discussion as an introduction to the sacraments, which you will be discussing for the next four class periods. Tell the class that in the Orthodox churches the sacraments are called “mysteries” (*khorhoort* in Armenian). In the same mysterious way as the Transfiguration took place, the sacraments transform or change or transfigure things in our lives so that they are filled with him.

As an example, read together Matthew 4:1-4. The devil asks Christ to use bread as mere bread, something to fill his stomach, and Jesus refuses, saying that bread is not enough to keep us alive if it is just bread.

Now read together **John 6:1-35**. Note that Jesus understands and fills our need for bread to eat, but gives thanks for it as a gift from God. Then he talks of the “true bread from heaven” and says that he is the bread of life. So eating bread can be a way of being in touch with God, rather than merely filling our stomachs. This is what happens in the sacraments.

Ask the class in what sacrament we take part in this eating of bread. (Holy Communion—*communing* with God.) (15 min.)

3. Have the class do the exercise “Symbols of Change: Transfigurations” in their student texts, pages 47 and 48.

Discuss afterwards, using the following information for guidance:

- a. The water of baptism becomes a means of “new birth.”
- b. Two people start a new life, together and united. They ask God's blessing on this new life.
- c. A man becomes, through God's grace, his servant. The man takes a new name to represent his new life.
- d. Christ said they are his Body and Blood.
- e. It became a means of healing, and a sign of Christ's love and power to heal. (15 min.)

4. Tell the class that we usually count seven acts as sacraments: baptism, chrismation, communion, penance, ordination, marriage, and anointing with oil. Ask them to think of how they would like to make a banner, to represent the sacraments. You will need to plan the layout, illustrations or symbols for each sacrament, a theme or slogan, etc. Work this out with the class' help and then, in as much time as you have left, begin the actual making of the banner. (20 min.)

Close with a prayer.